



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

Garments of Skin, Garments of Light Week of March 1, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The season of Great Lent in the Orthodox Church begins with the image of Adam and Eve sitting outside the gates of paradise and weeping.

We heard the entire story on Friday of the first week at the Presanctified Liturgy. Adam and Eve in the ancient account are in paradise, receiving everything freely from the hand of God Himself. But in a series of actions that prefigure every sin on the part of every human being since, they cast aside the will of the Father and follow their own will instead; they eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, attempting in their action to violently make themselves gods unto themselves instead of allowing the Lord God Himself to be their God. Prior to their sin, they had known only good, for the Supreme Good and the source of all good is God Himself, and *that* He gave them freely. But by following their own will,

they learned to know not only good, but evil as well – for evil always has as its source that which is opposed to the will of God. And as such, according to the ancient account, they were cast out of paradise. This image of them sitting outside the gates of paradise weeping for what they had lost is the image of Great Lent and, one can say, the image of life itself in a world that has turned from the will of God.

We all know this account so very well that we sometimes miss an important point. The Lord cast them out of paradise not as much to punish them but to protect them; he barred the way to life eternal – which is represented in the story by the Tree of Life, because He loved them as He loves all that He has made. He clothed them in garments of skin – the very symbol of their mortality, and thereby allowed them in mercy to have mortal lives, to die. Although He did not create us to die, He permits it in mercy. We do not think of this account in that way very often, but it is so. The Lord allowed Adam and Eve to be subject to death, because to live eternally in sin is the very definition of hell. Hell is wherever and whenever the reign of man supplants the reign of God; and heaven, the Kingdom of God, is wherever and whenever God reigns, wherever and whenever we allow God's will to be done. Thus, we all pray as our Lord taught us, *"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

The tragedy of every human life is that every human life to a greater or lesser degree knows the sin of Adam and Eve by choice. Every violence, every suffering, every injustice and unrighteousness, every unfulfilled desire and disappointment is the result of sin, sin so pervasive that its terrible reach into the life of every human being who has ever lived cannot be undone by anyone but by God Himself. Only He can make right what we have made wrong.

Thus, you see, the image of Adam and Eve are brought before our eyes once again on the Day which is the goal of our Holy Season, the Day of Pascha, the wondrous and bright day of our Lord's resurrection. The icon of the Resurrection of our Lord does not merely show Christ alive and victorious, but it shows Christ alive and victorious for the sake of Adam and Eve, for the sake of every human being who has ever lived or who will ever live. For Christ, standing above the image of His Cross crushing Satan down to the depths of hell reaches out to Adam and Eve, and we see Him pulling them out of the tombs to rise with Him. The garments of skin have been replaced with Garments of Light, new garments of Life Eternal with Him; sin is forgiven, and reconciliation between God and man is achieved. This image is seen not only in the icon of Pascha, but it is repeated again and again in words and in song at all the Divine Services, and so very powerfully near the very end of every Sunday Matins Service: *Most blessed art Thou, O Virgin Theotokos, * for through Him Who became incarnate of Thee is hades led captive, * Adam recalled, the curse annulled, Eve set free, * death slain, and we are given life. * Wherefore, we cry aloud in praise: * Blessed is Christ God Who hast been so pleased, glory to Thee.*

It has been a slow start to Great Lent this year. The weather has been brutal, and even when we have not had snow and ice falling outside, we have been unable to find a place to park to get into the church. For four weeks now we have not been able to bring our brothers and sisters from Hillside; many of you have not been able to come either. But each of us may nevertheless be of good cheer indeed! For the goal and purpose of this holy season stands before all of us nevertheless! The garments of skin, our mortality, have been replaced by Garments of Light. Our time of weeping outside of the gates of paradise is over, for the Lord Jesus Christ has come to bring us back; the offer of His forgiveness is before us, an offer that each of us may take freely in repentance. Let each of us prepare for the great moment when we will sing of His resurrection, for *His* resurrection is *our* resurrection, and He stands ready to pull each and every one of us from the darkness of our despair into the light of His eternal hope, Glory to God for all things!

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084