



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Samaritan Woman

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Christ is risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Having come to the well by faith, the Samaritan woman beheld Thee, the Water of Wisdom, of which she drank lavishly, and inherited the kingdom on high, where her praises are sung eternally. (Troparion for the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman)

The Troparion for the Fifth Sunday of Pascha gives us a clear picture of the reason we hear the lesson about the Samaritan woman in our Gospel Lesson for the day. Jesus' encounter with the woman whom we have come to know as St. Photini, reminds us of our oneness with Him through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Remember that in the earliest of Christian times catechumens were prepared for Holy Baptism during the time of Great Lent and then brought for their reception of the great Mystery on the Feast of Holy Pascha itself. Brought into knowledge of the One True God and Savior Jesus Christ during Great Lent, they were now Baptized, Chrismated and given their first Holy Communion on the Feast of Feasts itself. And then during the weeks following Holy Pascha they were reminded by their Bishops and teachers of the meaning of what they had received and in which they had participated. The encounter of

our Lord with St. Photini at Jacob's well in Samaria was a strong reminder that Holy Baptism had united them indelibly with the One Who is the Life of the World. He says to her, "... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Only in Jesus Christ is there Eternal Life and Salvation.

The whole story of our Lord at Jacob's well in Samaria is told in Chapter Four of the Gospel of John. And it is an important story for many reasons. Jesus does and says a number of things in that account that would have been quite shocking to the people of His time. He speaks not only with a Samaritan, a race of people hated by the Jews of His time, but with a Samaritan woman, something no other Rabbi of that time would have done. Not only does He speak with a Samaritan who is a woman, however, but with one who is a sinner, a sinner whose misdeeds were public and shocking. Furthermore, He seeks aid from her; during the hottest hour of the day, He asks her for water to drink. He takes every opportunity to engage her in conversation, in relationship, breaking down the barriers that would normally have stood between them as a Rabbi, a woman, a sinner and a Samaritan. He reaches out to her and treats her quite frankly as others would not have treated her, as a human being.

This outreach resulted in an exchange between them which is itself enlightening. She, Photini, asks Him the question of questions: "Where is God?" Or, as she words it, "Where is God rightly to be worshipped, in Jerusalem or Samaria?" She encounters Him and recognizes Him as someone entirely different, as someone special. He answers the question by speaking of His Oneness with the Father, to be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. He challenges her to speak truthfully with Him, asking her to call her husband, knowing full well that she is living in sin with a man who is not her husband. She does not deny the truth that He points out to her, instead admitting it openly. She speaks to Him about the Messiah who was to come; Jesus says openly to her that He is the Messiah, "I Who speak to you am He!" Her relationship with the Lord, initiated by Him in the spirit of love and acceptance of her, is subsequently reciprocated by her. She becomes a woman of faith in only a few moments and goes to speak of Him to many in her Samaritan village. Later in the fourth chapter of the Gospel St. John relates how others came to Him through her witness. In a sense, she becomes the first of many witnesses to come, the first who is united to Christ who then goes and brings others to Him as well.

This story is the story of each of us, is it not? We come to Christ only through His intervention. Through the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit Whom He, the Lord Jesus, sends from the Father on high, we are brought to our first encounter with the Lord. Perhaps through our parents, who heeded the call of the Spirit and brought us to Holy Baptism as infants; perhaps through our spouse or a friend or even the simple reading of Holy Scripture or the writings of the Holy Fathers. The Spirit seeks us and brings us whenever we have hearts that are open. We were

united to Him in Holy Baptism and continue to receive Grace upon Grace through our lives in His Church. He feeds us with the only food which is truly alive, the Living Bread of Heaven, His own Precious Body and Blood. All other food we take into our bodies is dead. Only the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord is living, alive! And He comes to us continually with the same love He showed to Photini. He treats us as human beings. Through Him in the Holy Spirit we are able to admit the truth about ourselves, even as Photini could admit the truth about herself. We can, we may, acknowledge our sin before Him, for in His Grace, He accepts our repentance with Divine Forgiveness, thus empowering us to go forth as Photini did, to speak truth to others so as to lead them to Truth.

These things are all there, recorded in the little story we will hear on Sunday morning, the morning of the Fifth Sunday in Pascha. It is a reminder of the indelible nature of our Holy Baptism, of the love of God through the Lord Jesus Christ for us, even in our sin, a call to face up to the truth about ourselves and put aside the pretense, admit our failings, our sin, and accept the ineffable condescension of our God Who chooses in His Divine Mercy to forgive and accept and love. This is the story of the woman at the well, the story of our God Whose good will it is to save.

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Fr. Elias

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