
ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

JUNE 2021 NEWSLETTER AND CALENDAR



Creation and Ascension

by Fr. Stephen De Young

***From his highly Recommended
Blog "The Whole Council"***

The feast of Christ's Ascension represents one of the most important liturgical moments of the Christian year. It is, unfortunately, generally under-appreciated. Due to where it falls in the cycle of feasts, it is sometimes seen as a sort of epilogue to Pascha. In our modern life, it falls in the summer which has become a time for vacations, time off from work and school and even sometimes church. It falls in mid-week, which in the modern working world makes its participation more difficult for many people. For ancient people, however, the feast of the Ascension of Christ would have been intuitively the most important. The Ascension represents the culmination of the gospel which was proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles.

Key to understanding the importance of Christ's Ascension is the understanding that this does not represent merely Christ flying into the sky or going away. Before the Ascension, Christ promises the exact opposite (Matt 28:20). While St. John's Gospel uses the language of departing and going away, it is in the context of the coming of the Holy Spirit which will bring the apostles to know Christ and the Father even more intimately (cf. John 16:7ff). Rather, Christ's Ascension is the feast of his enthronement in the heavens. As we will see, the basis of worship, of ritual, of proclamation, of sacred architecture, of iconography, and of sacrificial piety in the ancient world was the enthronement of God. This was true in ancient Judaism surrounding the temple and it was equally true in early Christianity.

Ancient Near Eastern myth followed a similar paradigm regardless of culture with strands of these ideas found in Egyptian and early Greek myth as well.

The central story or epic cycle involved a divine rebellion against a previous most high god which represented the forces of chaos and death in the world.

In this struggle, often as an accidental byproduct rather than a deliberate act, the world and humanity are created.

Following a victory in this struggle, the winner, still conceived as the son of a divine father, was enthroned in a newly created palace temple generally within a garden and/or atop a mountain. This structure can be seen in the case of Baal, Marduk, Zeus, and many others.

Individual temples are instantiations of that primary dwelling of the god. Within the worship of those pagan temples, the architecture and iconography were

designed to retell this story. The story was told and sung directly. The story was reenacted and participated in by worshippers through ritual. The sacrificial meals were a victory feast, a celebration at the enthronement of the god as king of that city or empire.

Genesis 1-3 tells a parallel story regarding Yahweh the God of Israel, but with important corrections regarding his identity and the creation of the world.

The first and most obvious is that while a rebellion is described in Genesis 3, it is not Yahweh rebelling against a previous god, but rather a failed attempt by a subordinate to rebel against Yahweh.

All of the other elements, including those representing chaos (i.e. the waters) obey the commands of the God of Israel immediately and perfectly.

Even in the case of the rebellion of Genesis 3, the devil is simply thrown down to the realm of the dead by a divine command with no struggle or battle necessary. While the imagery of Yahweh battling the monstrous forces of chaos is poetically referenced in the Old Testament (as in Psalm 74 and Isaiah 27 as but two examples), it is notably absent from Genesis 1-3. Genesis 1 describes Yahweh constructing the entire creation as his temple palace in which he will reign as king. The "resting" of the seventh day is Yahweh's taking his throne to rule over the entirety of his created order. The final stage of the construction of an ancient temple was the placing of the image of the god within it. This is corrected in the description of the formation of human persons and their placement within the temple elaborated in Genesis 2 to serve as Yahweh's image.

The tabernacle and the temple, then, were constructed as images of Paradise in particular, and the entire creation of which it is a microcosm. The structures, the iconography, and the worship of tabernacle and temple were constructed around telling this story of the enthronement of Yahweh over all creation. The central element of the inner temple was the two massive cherubim (over 15 feet high) who represented the throne of Yahweh. The story of Yahweh's creation of all things in heaven and on earth and rule over them was retold through the worshippers' surroundings, through psalms and hymns, through the direct telling of the story, and through ritual recreation and participation. This proclamation was against the reality that human and angelic rebellions against Yahweh, though futile, were still ongoing within the God of Israel's creation (Ps 2). This proclamation ended with the prophetic promise that Yahweh would return to his creation in a new act to put an end to these rebellions and reestablish justice and peace.

Daniel 7 prophetically describes the solution that will come to these rebellions. Daniel saw in his visions terrifying embodiments of these spiritual and human rebellions against Yahweh and his rule. In describing their final end, Daniel 7 directly utilizes the imagery of the enthronement of Baal by his father El while again correcting it. In Daniel's vision, Yahweh remains enthroned over all creation as the Most High God.

Another figure is portrayed who is also Yahweh but appears as a human. This second hypostasis of Yahweh, the divine Son, is victorious over the rebellious



The "Ancient of Days" from Daniel 7

powers and is enthroned with dominion over all of the creation given by his Father. Another cycle of victory and enthronement will take place through the person of God the Son.

The apostles repurposed the Greek word translated as gospel (evangelion) to make this understanding clear. In its extra-Biblical use, this word occurs almost entirely in the plural (evangelia). This term referred to the proclamation of the victories of a Roman general or emperor prior to his arrival at a city.

The 'gospel of God' or the 'gospel of Jesus Christ,' then, is the recounting and proclamation of the story of Christ's victory over the powers of sin, death, and Hades culminating in his enthronement over the entirety of the creation. St. Matthew's Gospel ends with Christ being invested with all

authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). The longer ending added to St. Mark's Gospel ends with the proclamation of the gospel to all of the creation (Mark 16:15) and his subsequent enthronement (v. 19). Christ sits at the right hand of the Father because he is not a rebellious son who overthrows his father to seize power like the pagan gods. Rather, he is an obedient son who receives dominion from the Father as glorification for his victory (Phil 2:5-11). St. Luke's Gospel concludes with Christ's ascent into heaven (Luke 24:50-53). The Acts of the Apostles begins in the same place, adding the detail that Christ is taken to heaven on a cloud, directly connecting this event to the enthronement in Daniel 7 (Acts 1:9).

The apostolic proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ sees his ascension and enthronement as the climax of his victory (Acts 2:33-36, 5:31; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:20-23). Church temples are constructed and adorned with iconography to retell the story of this victory before that place where Christ sits enthroned with the altar as his footstool. The story of this victory is retold through hymns, the reading of scripture, and direct proclamation. This victory is celebrated and participated in through ritual and the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Through the life of the church, the proclamation of the gospel, culminating in Christ's ascension and enthronement is made to the entire world in preparation for that day on which the same Christ appears to judge the living and the dead establishing justice for eternity in a renewed and transfigured creation.



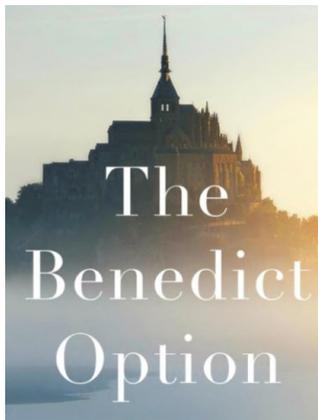
Between Mother's Day (May 9), and Father's Day (June 20) we will be participating in the Pregnancy Center's Baby Bottle Boomerang fundraiser. Please take a baby bottle, fill it with your loose change or a check, and return it by Father's Day (June 20). This is a great opportunity to teach our children about the value of life, even in the womb.

The Pregnancy Center of Monroe County offers, free of charge: Pregnancy Testing, Options Counseling, Post-Abortion Support, Parenting Classes, Adoption Assistance, Pre-Natal Educational Programs, Clothes Closet, Mentoring

Many Years!

Birthdays

- 1 John Savage
- 5 Nichole Thomae
- 7 Heidi Hintermaier
- 7 Ion Munteanu
- 10 Toni Paglieri
- 12 Chris McCan
- 13 Michelle Marble
- 14 Anna Hill
- 16 Olga Plummer
- 17 Jordan Thomae
- 18 Joshua Marble
- 19 Andrew Ennis
- 26 Sara Andrews
- 27 Jake Radford
- 29 Elena Berger



New Book Study

*starting in June
led by Gary Cox*

Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. New York: Sentinel, 2017

What should be the Church's---and indeed Christendom's---response to a culture that is increasingly secular, pagan, and in many ways openly condemnatory of traditional Christian values and beliefs. This is the subject of *The Benedict Option*. I long resisted reading Dreher's book because of my belief that as a new convert to Orthodoxy Dreher had too freely and publicly involved himself in parish politics; because of this animus, I too easily accepted rather dismissive reviews of this book, which characterized the author's beliefs as focusing on withdrawal from the world to form Christian communes. But then I read Dreher's *Live Not by Lies*, an examination of how eastern European Christians---Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox---survived their seventy year ordeal with totalitarianism; it became clear to me that I had succumbed to reductionist fallacies that painted Dreher's ideas as a sort of Christian "Fiddler on the Roof" vision of happy peasants walled off from the world and its people.

I am certainly not saying that I necessarily agree with Dreher---some of his ideas and their implications profoundly trouble me. The state of our culture, however, troubles me a good deal more, and suggests that traditional Christians need to examine the signs of the times to discern what our response to modernity will be.

Dreher himself provides a vehicle for an examination of his ideas, with a series of

discussion questions (which for some reason I didn't find in my "Kindle" edition) grouped by chapter. Some implicitly criticize the book; we should feel no hesitation to sharpen that critique.

Using some of these questions as a starting point, I propose dividing *The Benedict Option* into four discussions:

- Part I: The Problem---read the Introduction & chapters 1-2.
- Part II: The Solution (thru the Church)---read chapters 3; 5; 9.
- Part III: The Solution (Politics, Education, Technology)---read chapters 4; 7; 10
- Part IV: The Solution (Daily Living)---read chapters 6; 8; Conclusion

I propose picking out for our work some of Dreher's interrogatories, as well as whatever questions occur to us as we read, in order to see if Dreher's description of our plight, and his proposed solution, offer anything we as a parish ought to consider as we maintain our collision course with the future.

A final word: however our discussions unfold, they will absolutely avoid partisan politics: "evil, power-hungry Dimmocrats" and "wicked, wascally Wepublicans" are creatures for another day, and forum. Dreher himself may be too young to remember Walt Kelly and his legendary comic strip "Pogo"---but he would subscribe to the eponymous lead character's frequent injunction that "we have met the enemy and they is us"; he says that there is more than enough blame to go around on all sides of the political spectrum for our present discontents.

In any event, our focus will NOT be on politics, but on the situation of Christians and their Church in a milieu that can most charitably be described as "challenging." Certainly, our discussions need to include an evaluation of Dreher's description of the culture, as well as the merits (and de-merits!) of his proposed solution.

I invite you all to what should prove an interesting discussion. Venues, dates and times to be determined. For now, please let Father know if you are interested in participating.

Gary



The Great Feast of Pentecost

Farley, D. (2002). *Seasons of Grace: Reflections on the Orthodox Church Year*

FIRE FOR US IS EASY. A flick of a lighter, or even the push of a button, and a picture-perfect fire is burning placidly in our modern hearths. If you have no hearth, never mind—you can get a virtual fire in the form of a videotape, complete with the sound of the crackling and popping of wood.

For the ancients, though, it was a matter of patient labor to bring forth sparks from flint, feeding the kindling with their breath. Or they might preserve a fire they already had, carefully banking the ashes at night to be stirred and resurrected into flames in the morning. Apart from these, there was only one way to get fire: to wait for lightning to strike.

The untamable power of the lightning bolt could suddenly consume whatever it struck; yet without fire, man would be condemned to live as an animal—no cooking, no blacksmithery, no defense against the predators of night or the cold of winter. Fire seems something not

quite of this world; it can fall from the sky in a blaze of destruction, or elevate and transform everyday life by its mysterious consuming, heat- and light-giving power. It is no accident that God in the Old Testament is associated with storm and fire (e.g. Psalm 18:7–15).

In our post-industrial world, we think we understand fire because we know it is a chemical process, a matter of atoms and molecules. A few people—firefighters among them—know it is more. The film *Backdraft* gives a few hints about fire's transcendent character, but those of us sitting in the audience are not easy to impress. Almost daily we see pyrotechnic explosions on the news or in the movies, and they do not go to our hearts, for they are carefully confined to the screen, with the volume turned down. How then can we begin to imagine what it felt like to be there on the Day of Pentecost?

They had been waiting ten days, since Jesus ascended into heaven, for the Spirit He had promised. Waiting for God's lightning to strike.

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them,” Saint Luke writes in the Acts of the Apostles (2:2, 3).

God's own special effects, these. But they did not simply dazzle the eyes. With the flames came a supernatural gift of language, a reversal of the ancient curse of Babel, corroborated by witnesses who had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast from throughout the known world.

They heard these untaught Galileans, country hicks, speaking in numerous tongues about the wonderful works of God.

The tongues of fire settled upon the disciples, but like the burning bush encountered by Moses, these human vessels were not consumed. Yet we must not think they were untouched. They were in fact so profoundly transformed that they were no longer confined only to the language they had known from the cradle. They could begin to speak in languages they had never learned. They spoke nothing but the praise of God, for, like the Prophet Isaiah with the coal touched to his lips, they had been purified by flame (Isaiah 6:6, 7).

Not just at Pentecost, but every day, Orthodox Christians pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, in the prayer, "O Heavenly King," asking that He "cleanse us from every impurity." How dare we? Do we really want a "rushing mighty wind" to sweep in and set flames upon our heads? If we do, we must be prepared to do as the embryonic Church did: continue "with one accord in prayer and supplication." The flames of the Spirit descended on each individual, but only when they had first assembled together.

We need the patience of waiting for lightning to strike, the persistence of breathing our prayers out upon the kindling of our souls until they catch. And then what will happen?

The Apostle Peter warns us, "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.... If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:12, 14).



Read the Book of Acts to see how the fire of God's Spirit burns. See how the Spirit draws the openhearted, Jew and Gentile, with the warmth of love diffused through the disciples. See how He strikes in flaming judgment when Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Apostles. See how He puts the beasts of night, the demons, to flight with His incandescent power. And see, yes, how He refines the pure gold of the Church in the furnace of martyrdom. Thrilling, but a little frightening, isn't it? Let me leave you with a last thought in the form of a haiku I wrote some years ago:

you must be prepared
if you pray for holy fire to
get your hair singed.



ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH
7301 Rivoli Road - Macon, Georgia 31210



JUNE 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
May 30 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	May 31	1	2 6:00pm Daily Vespers	3	4	5 2pm Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
6 Blind Man 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship 12:45pm Ask Father?	7	8 7 pm <i>The Benedict Option</i>	9 6:00pm Vigil for Ascension	10 ASCENSION OF THE LORD 9 am Festal Divine Liturgy for Ascension	11	12 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
13 Fr.s of the 1 Ecumenical Council 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship 12:45am Ask Father?	14	15 7 pm Parish Council Meeting	16 6:00pm Daily Vespers 7:00pm <i>The Benedict Option</i>	17	18	19 2 pm Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Vigil for Pentecost
20 PENTECOST 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Festal Divine Liturgy for Pentecost 11:45am Vespers of Pentecost/Kneeling Prayers 12:30pm Food and Fellowship	21	22 7pm OCLI Meeting	23 6:00pm Daily Vespers 7:00pm <i>The Benedict Option</i>	24 Nativity of the Baptist 9 am Divine Liturgy	25 <i>Fr. Theophan on Vacation through July 2nd</i>	26 6:00pm Great Vespers
27 All Saints <i>Fr. Seraphim Joa visiting priest</i> 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	28	29 Ss. Peter & Paul	30 6:00pm Readers Vespers	Jul 1	Jul 2 St. John Maximovich	Jul 3 2pm Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers

Please consult the Sunday bulletin for changes to the monthly calendar.