

EVANGELION
The Power of God

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Chapter 6
SUPPER
IN PARADISE

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CHAPTER 6

SUPPER IN PARADISE

WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT ALL YOU GET

We live in a fallen world reduced to being only the empirical world of our five senses. But even the empirical world is further reduced to those realities detectable by our five senses.

We live in a middle range of sizes. We speak of light years but we really don't comprehend distances larger than several miles. We really can't comprehend a subatomic world where electrons randomly cease to exist in one location only simultaneously to exist in a different location.

Colors and sounds exist as wave lengths. There are certain frequencies of sound that move too fast or too slow for the human ear to hear. There are certain frequencies of light that move too fast or too slow for the human eye to see. These sounds and these colors exist but they exist outside of our human capability to know them, to see them or hear them.

We are told billions of neutrinos pass through our bodies every second and we never know it. They are so small and move at such speed that they pass through us without touching any part of us. In fact they pass through the earth and never touch anything.

We live in the world of our five senses but that world is only a tiny portion of the world that is there.¹ God is the maker of heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible, and that includes the subatomic world and neutrinos. But it also includes the unseen spiritual world.

LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE INVISIBLE WORLD

Knowing there are sounds, colors and even neutrinos all around us is one thing but most of us quite comfortably only live in the world our five senses give us. We live in the world we touch and feel. We not only live in the world of our five senses but most of us, most of the time, forget there is any other world, a larger world we live in.

We can believe the Kingdom of God is invisibly here. We can believe here already, now already that we are living in Paradise. But most of the time, the same as everybody else, we only live in the visible world we see. How can we learn to live in Paradise?

There is a relationship between revelation and worship. Worship is the only appropriate response to revelation. It is in our worship in the Divine Liturgy that we most clearly, and regularly, are reminded that Paradise contains both the visible and the invisible. Sunday after Sunday, Divine Liturgy after Divine Liturgy, as we meet with God at his appointed place the reality of being in Paradise, of being in the Kingdom of God, is experienced.

THE DIVINE LITURGY

The Patriarch of Moscow was asked by a reporter in the 20th century, What is the Russian Orthodox Church? The Patriarch replied, “A Church that celebrates the Divine Liturgy.”

¹ Please see Fr. Deacon Ezra, *These Things We Believe* for a discussion of these issues.

The Church lives in the Kingdom of God. She lives in Life. “In the Divine Liturgy those in heaven and those in earth, both the living and the dead, both humanity and the Angelic hosts, are united together in the worship of our King and our God. In the Divine Liturgy those of us who are visible represent not only ourselves. We also represent those who are invisibly present with us. We step into the worship that is already taking place [invisibly] when the deacon says: Bless, Master! To which the priest responds...”²

BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM

Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

“The Kingdom, which is to come, is here invisibly present with us. Here already, now already, in this place, at this moment the Kingdom has come.”³ Those of us present, along with the living departed, the human along with the angelic, side by side worshipping together and in one accord “to make our common supplication unto thee.”⁴

PRAYER OF THE FIRST ANTIPHON

O Lord our God, whose might is beyond compare, whose glory is incomprehensible, whose mercy is infinite, and whose love toward mankind is ineffable: do thou thyself, O Master, in thy tender compassion **look down upon us** and upon this holy house, and grant us and those who pray with us thy rich mercies and compassions.⁵

² Fr. Deacon Ezra, 214. See Philip Sherrard, *Church, Papacy and Schism: A Theological Inquiry* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, Publisher, 1978), for a discussion of making visible that which is invisibly present.

³ Fr. Deacon Ezra, 214. See Sherrard, *Church, Papacy and Schism*, 22, “The local church, as its name denotes, ‘localizes’ the Kingdom of God and manifests it in time and place.”

⁴ Antiochian Red Service Book, 96.

⁵ Emphasis added.

In the face of mystery and ineffability we must use metaphors. How do we speak about the Kingdom of God breaking in to our visible world? One way, metaphorically, was to speak spatially. Heaven was up; Hades was down.

Western architecture put steeples on its churches and pointed to a God that was “up there.” After the Russian cosmonauts went into space and declared they could not find God “up there,”⁶ God moved from being “up there” to being “out there,” outside the universe.⁷

The Orthodox Church does not have a steeple. It has a dome. The dome is the canopy of heaven drawn near to earth and encompassing the earth below. In the dome is the icon of Christ, the Pantocrator, Ruler of Heaven and Earth. In the dome we see the human face of God, the Word who become flesh and dwelt among us.

Asking God to “look down upon us” is a way of acknowledging that God is already present with us. He is at least as close as the icon on the ceiling of the dome. God is close. He is in the sanctuary. We see his icon looking at us not only in our dome but the icon of Christ on the iconostasis—again placing God among us.

Heaven, for us, is not a spatial term.⁸ It designates the spiritual world that was lost to us when it became invisible to us with our Fall. Heaven is the world of Life versus the empirical world of

⁶ Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev attributed the comments to Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. Gagarin, an Orthodox Christian, who took an icon with him when he became the first human in space, never made the statement about not being able to find God.

⁷ See Stephen Freeman, *Everywhere Present: Christianity in a One-Storey Universe* for a discussion on this topic.

⁸ “For God does not admit of *where*, he is unqualifiedly beyond all *where*.” St Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium 61* in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 142.

Death in which humanity lives. In the Divine Liturgy we have stepped into the world of Life. We have stepped into the world where the visible and invisible are both present.

PRAYER OF THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

O Master, our God, who hast appointed in heaven orders and hosts of Angels and Archangels for **the service** of thy glory: **cause that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy Angels serving with us and glorifying thy goodness:** for unto thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The term *liturgy* is found in both the Greek Old and New Testaments. In English it is often translated *service* or ministry. As the Book of Hebrews reminds us, the Liturgy we do on earth is the Divine Liturgy of heaven.⁹ That is to say, in the Divine Liturgy both heaven and earth celebrate the same liturgy—and celebrate it together.

In the Prayer of the Little Entrance we ask that our liturgy include the Angelic host. We ask that as we make the Little Entrance to the altar that the room be filled with the Angelic host who shall enter the altar simultaneously with us. As we enter we sing the Entrance Hymn.

THE ENTRANCE HYMN

Come, **let us worship** and **fall down before Christ**. Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, who sing unto thee: Alleluia.

The Entrance with the Angels is an entrance into worship. Again, worship is the only acceptable response to revelation. Christ is present among us, as he was with Peter, James and John on the

⁹ Hebrews 9:1 speaks of “divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.”

Mount of Transfiguration; as he was with Thomas in the Upper Room. Like them we too fall down in worship before Christ our God who is in the room with us.

THE PRAYER OF THE THRICE-HOLY HYMN

O holy God, **who restest in thy Holy Place; who art hymned by the Seraphim with thrice-holy cry, and glorified by the Cherubim, and worshipped by every heavenly Power;** Who out of nothing hast brought all things into being; who hast created man after thine own image and likeness and hast adorned him with thine every gift; who givest to him that askest wisdom and understanding; who despiseth not the sinner, but hast appointed repentance unto salvation; **who hast vouchsafed unto us, thy humble and unworthy servants, even in this hour to stand before the glory of thy holy Altar and to offer the worship and praise which are due unto thee: Thyself, O Master, accept even from the mouth of us sinners the thrice-holy hymn and visit us in thy goodness.** Forgive us every transgression both voluntary and involuntary; sanctify our souls and bodies; and grant us to serve thee in holiness all the days of our lives, through the intercession of the holy Theotokos and of all thy saints, who from the beginning of the world have been well pleasing unto thee.

In the English translation used by the Greek Orthodox Church in North America, the phrase “restest in thy Holy Place” is translated “who dwells among thy saints”¹⁰ The place of God is to dwell in the midst of his people. John had a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, Paradise, where the invisible and visible were once again united. He saw the new Jerusalem, the Church, and heard a voice saying, “Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them.”¹¹

¹⁰ Following the English translation by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.

¹¹ Revelation 21:3

The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, declared, “I saw the Lord. He was high and lifted up and the smoke filled the temple. And the angels cried, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. The whole earth is full of his glory”¹² The veil between the visible and invisible had parted and Isaiah saw God being worshipped by the angels in the temple.

In the Liturgy God is being worshipped by the Seraphim and the Cherubim. They cry out to God, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” And we acknowledge that God has permitted us to stand with them, to stand with the Angels and to add our human voices to theirs, and to sing the Thrice-Holy Hymn to God with them.

THE THRICE-HOLY HYMN

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy upon us. (*Three times*)

Glory be to the Father, and Son, and to the Holy Spirit: both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.

(With strength)

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy upon us, have mercy on us.

THE CHERUBIC HYMN

Following the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel and the Homily, we sing the Cherubic Hymn.

We who mystically represent the Cherubim, and sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn, let us now lay aside all earthly care: that we may receive the King of all, who comes invisibly upborne by the Angelic hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

¹² Isaiah 6: 1-3

The Cherubic Hymn is the only hymn in the Liturgy that is addressed specifically to human worshippers. The Cherubic Hymn begins following the Gospel reading or Homily and is concluded at the end of the Great Entrance, which has interrupted it.

The Cherubic Hymn reminds us that we *mystically represent* the invisible cherubim as we sing the Thrice-Holy Hymn along with the cherubim. We are doing visibly what the angels and departed loved ones are doing invisibly in the room with us.

We remind ourselves that we need to lay aside our earthly cares. We have lived all week in a dead empirical world. We have come to church. But after a week in the visible world we have forgotten we are now living in a new world where the visible and invisible are joined together as the Kingdom of God. We therefore remind ourselves to exhale and let go of the dead visible world, and lay aside those earthly, visible issues which we all have. We are no longer citizens of the empirical world. We have become citizens of Paradise like the Penitent Thief.¹³

In the Great Entrance our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ is being escorted in, carried in upon the cherubic throne, down the center aisle of the church, through the Holy Doors to the Holy Altar.

When I was in Rome during my undergraduate days the Pope was to celebrate a mass. I had left early enough to get inside St. Peter's, but I was all the way at the back. The altar was so far away I knew I could never see the Pope. They had cordoned off a wide aisle down the center of

¹³ The Beatitudes in the Orthodox Funeral Service, Antiochian Red Service Book, 194.

the nave that stretched from the altar all the way to the back where it made a ninety degree turn and went over to doors in the wall.

I was standing at the outside corner of the turn, facing towards the door in the wall. All at once the wide doors opened. In came Pope Paul the VI sitting on a throne that was carried by poles on the shoulders of several men. I was staring directly at the pope as those carrying him made their way towards me, and then turned right in front of me, and headed down the long center aisle to the altar.

The throng of people erupted in boisterous clapping. Pope Paul VI turned from side to side and blessed the people as those carrying him slowly progressed down the center aisle to the altar.

I recall that scene of seeing the Pope being lifted up and carried in when we sing those words, “that we may receive the King of all, who comes invisibly upborne, lifted up, carried in, and escorted by the Angelic Hosts.”

This is a dramatic moment. In the Divine Liturgy one mightier than the Bishop of Rome is being carried down this aisle. Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ is entering his sanctuary and is among his people.

Our sanctuary is filled during the Divine Liturgy. It is filled with “the people here present.” But it is also filled with thousands of angels. It is also filled with “the cloud of witnesses,”¹⁴ our departed loved ones. But most importantly, our God, the Undivided Trinity, is present, to whom we jointly offer praise and worship. We are all gathered together and without each other we

¹⁴ Hebrews 12:1

would not be complete.¹⁵ “There is no room for the slightest distinction between the worshipping Eucharistic community on earth and the actual worship in front of God’s throne.”¹⁶

THE PRAYER OF THE ANAPHORA¹⁷

It is meet and right to hymn thee, to bless thee, to praise thee, to give thanks unto thee, and to worship thee in every place of thy dominion: for thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same, thou and thy Only-begotten Son and thy Holy Spirit. **Thou it was who didst bring us from non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until thou hadst brought us back to heaven, and hadst endowed us with thy kingdom which is to come.** For all these things we give thanks unto thee, and to thine Only-begotten Son, and thy Holy Spirit; **for all things for which we know, and of which we know not, and for all the benefits bestowed upon us, both manifest and unseen.** And we give thanks unto thee **for this ministry** which thou dost vouchsafe to receive **at our hands, even though there stand beside thee thousands of Archangels and ten thousands of Angels, the cherubim and the Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft, borne on their wings. ...With these blessed Powers we also,** O Master who lovest mankind, **cry aloud** and say: Holy art thou and all-holy, thou and thine Only-begotten Son, and thy Holy Spirit.

Through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, God has raised us from being fallen. He has not ceased doing all things until he has brought us back to heaven, brought us back to Paradise, brought us back to living in Life. He has given us the Kingdom which is to come. Here already, now already, we are living in Paradise. We are living in Life. We are living in the Kingdom which is to come.

¹⁵ Hebrews 11:40

¹⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 233.

¹⁷ The part of the Divine Liturgy in which the consecration of the bread and wine occurs.

We thank God for now living in Paradise, for what we know and do not yet know, for what we see and for what we do not yet see, in our new life in Christ.

We thank God for permitting us to join the Divine Liturgy of heaven, for permitting us to participate in this ministry, *liturgy* in Greek, that God is pleased to have us join and offer with the angels. There are thousands of Archangels at the Altar. There are ten thousands of Angels at the Altar. The Cherubim and the Seraphim are soaring in the air above either side of the Altar. It is here that God meets with us. “I will meet with you between the wings of the Cherubim.”

THE DOOR OF PARADISE

The opening lines of the Troparion of the Advent Paraklesis tell us, “Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden hath been opened for all.” The Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection are three separate “events’ that are at the same time a unified whole. The conception and birth of Christ set in motion all those things that shall come to pass in restoring the way to Paradise. The birth of Christ points to his death and resurrection. The mission of God becoming Man, the purpose of the Incarnation, is to restore mankind to Paradise. Therefore at Advent we sing, “Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden hath been opened for all.”¹⁸

In our Funeral Service we remember Dismas, the Penitent Thief, “A citizen of Paradise, O Christ, thou didst make of the Thief, who, because of his repentance, upon the cross cried unto thee: Remember me! Make thou me, a sinner, worthy also of the same.”¹⁹

¹⁸ “Make ready, O Bethlehem” is also said by a priest at the beginning of the Proskomedia when the bread and the wine are being prepared at the prothesis prior to the Divine Liturgy.

¹⁹ The Beatitudes, Orthodox Funeral Service.

Paradise has been opened and we can become citizens of Paradise. But where is the entrance to Paradise? Where is the gate by which we enter? Christ told us to “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter by it. But the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”²⁰

On the day of Pentecost, after St. Peter preached his famous sermon, the people called out, “What shall we do?” Peter’s reply was for them, and for us and for all who are afar off, “Repent and be baptized.”

Repent, change your mind, stop what you are doing and do something else. An old Indian proverb says, “If we do not turn around, we will get where we’re going.” Repentance is to turn around.

When God came to Adam and Eve in Paradise after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, they could have repented. They could have confessed they had chosen death instead of life. They could have turned around, sought forgiveness, and sought a return to life. But they did not. They had turned their back on life and had embraced death. Given the opportunity to turn back around, they did not. They did not turn around and therefore got where they were going... the grave.

Each year, on the fourth Sunday before Great Lent, we remember the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.²¹ The services remind us of the importance of repentance. In Orthros we sing

²⁰ Matthew 7:13-14

²¹ Luke 18:9-14

“Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-giver.”²² For eight weeks, from the Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican to the 4th Sunday of Great Lent, we sing, “Open to me the doors of repentance, O life-giver.” On the second Sunday before Great Lent we sing, “The rank of the saints has found the Fount of life and the Gate of paradise. O, that I too may find the way through repentance, I the lost sheep.”²³ “...Grant me the beloved homeland, and make me also a dweller in Paradise.”²⁴

Repentance and baptism, the Fount of Life and the Gate of Paradise, are two parts of one act. Repentance is to turn around. Baptism is the first step forward in our new direction.

Christian baptism often occurred outside in rivers or pools of water. Later, when churches were built, separate buildings known as baptisteries were also built. Originally baptisms took place outside the church and inside a separate baptistery. These baptisteries were usually octagonal in shape. In Florence and Pisa in Italy the baptisteries are octagonal buildings located west of the entrance to the cathedral. The baptistery in Pisa is the largest in Italy. But the baptistery in Florence is the more famous because of its doors.

On the east side of the Florence baptistery are a pair of brass doors created by Lorenzo Ghiberti. It took Ghiberti twenty-one years to complete the doors. Upon seeing them Michelangelo called them the Gates of Paradise. Others have said they “must rank as the finest masterpiece ever created.”²⁵

²² Nasser, 606

²³ Nasser, 621

²⁴ Nasser, 622

²⁵ Renaissance architect Giorgio Vasari cited in “The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Renaissance

Upon being baptized the newly baptized joined a procession through the Gates of Paradise into the church where they would receive their first communion.

In Christian baptism we pray that God will “put off from *him* the old man, and renew *him* unto life everlasting; ...that *he* may be no more a child of the body, but a child of thy kingdom.”²⁶

Christian baptism is our narrow gate into Paradise, our narrow gate into the Kingdom of God. In baptism we turn our back on the world of death and embrace the invisible world of life.

DEAD TO THE OLD—ALIVE TO THE NEW

During the procession from the place of baptism into the church, they sang the processional hymn, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.”²⁷

Something was different in the newly baptized. They had passed out of the world of death into the world of life. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.”²⁸

The dead world we live in is a linear world. It is a world of time—past, present, and future. Paradise, the Kingdom of God, the world of Life, is non-linear. It is eternal and has no time.

We think in linear sequences, based on time, chronologically. We think of this life to be followed by the life to come. We think of this world and the world to come.

Masterpiece.” Seattle Art Museum: Exhibition Information. January 26-April 6, 2008. Downloaded from <http://www.seattlemuseum.org/exhibit/exhibitDetail.asp?eventID=11541> on Nov 11, 2011.

²⁶ A Prayer, Orthodox Baptism Service

²⁷ Galatians 3:27

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17

In religious terms many religions think this present world gives us an opportunity to buy or earn life in the world to come. Such religions offer religious rituals and daily acts that will get one to heaven or Nirvana or blessedness in a life to come. If we are just good enough, and practice their acts properly, so they tell us, we will gain heaven in the life to come.²⁹

But Christ comes preaching, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is here.” He offers the Kingdom of God, Paradise, right here, right now, to anyone and to everyone who will repent and begin living in the Kingdom.

In our prayers prior to the consecration of the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, we remember “all those things that have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Grave, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Session at the right hand, and the second and glorious Advent.”³⁰

There is no time in eternity. Even the Second Coming of Christ, the second and glorious Advent, is past for us. We have stepped across the boundary of the world of Death into the world of Life. We are not waiting for the Second Coming. We are now living on the other side of the Second Coming.

No one is ever “good enough” to go to heaven. Adam and Eve before the Fall weren’t good enough. But being “good enough” was never part of God’s plan.

²⁹ For a discussion of the Ethical Approach (keeping the rules) and the problems with such an approach see John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 230.

³⁰ The Anaphora, the Divine Liturgy, Antiochian Red Service Book.

Adam and Eve were already living in Paradise. His plan was *theosis*, for Adam and Eve to become like Him. Paradise is living in the world of Life, walking with God in the cool of the evening, and becoming like God. The issue was never being good enough to be in Paradise.

Adam and Eve were already in Paradise. The issue was becoming like God.

“Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden hath been opened for all.” In the Incarnation... Paradise has been opened for all. No one has to be good enough to get in. They only have to repent and enter through the door of baptism, the door of their death.

The life with God on the other side of death is available to us now, on this side of death. In baptism we have accepted the fact of our own death, and its killing the sin of our weak nature within us. And we are now living, as it were, on the other side of our death. We have stepped out of death into life. We have stepped out of this dead world into the world of Life.

In our baptism we not only put on Christ, clothe ourselves in Christ but “as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We are buried with Him through baptism into death.”³¹ Here already, now already, in this life already, we have passed from death into life.³² We are already raised from the dead and we now walk in a new life. We have stepped across the boundary of death. We have stepped outside the world of Death in which we live, and have stepped into the world of Life. The life that we now live we live to God.³³

³¹ Romans 6:3-4

³² 1 John 3:14

³³ Galatians 2:20

THE ISSUE IS DEATH

The issue is not Hell. The issue is Death. We spend our lives trying to ignore Death. In the United States we no longer have funerals. We have cremations. The person has disappeared. We have a box or urn full of ashes that we joyfully scatter with the wind or on the waters. Even when there is a funeral, the funeral is not about Death. It is a video extravaganza of pictures, film clips and music often presented on multiple screens.

No matter how hard we try to ignore Death, Death is always with each of us. No one “can really ignore Death. . . . whether we are aware of it or not – usually we are not – death *conditions* our entire being and lies at the root of all that we do and think.”³⁴ We are literally living in Death, and Death shapes our very lives.

We can only speak using metaphors. This world and this life is all we know, but we are living in Death. Through Christ the world of Life, the way to Paradise, has been once more opened. It is open to us now. We die now, in baptism as it were, and we begin living in Paradise. This is what Paul means when he says, “if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”³⁵ We are now living on the other side of our own death.

³⁴ Zizoulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 41 and note.

³⁵ Galatians 2:17

BORN INTO LIFE

When Nicodemus came to Jesus and spoke with him about the Kingdom of God, Christ told him, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”³⁶

We are all born into this world of Death. We are living in Death. But we must get born into the world of Life. We must be born again. Unless we are born again we cannot see the invisible Kingdom of God that is present all around us.

In the Old Testament the Prophet Elisha was surrounded by the Syrian army. His servant said, “What shall we do?” Elisha replied, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha asked God to open the eyes of his servant and let him see. “And the Lord opened his eyes, and he was now able to see, and he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”³⁷

The Kingdom of God is here, invisibly present. But those living in Death cannot see the Kingdom unless they are born again, born into the world of Life.

Nicodemus did not understand. He thought Christ was talking about a second human birth. The second time Christ tells him, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”³⁸

³⁶ John 3:3

³⁷ 4 Kingdoms 6:15-17 (2 Kings 6:15-17 in a Protestant Bible).

³⁸ John 3:5

In his first reply Christ said unless you are born a second time you cannot *see* the Kingdom. In his second reply Christ says without being born of water and the Spirit, you cannot *enter* the Kingdom of God.

Without Christian baptism you cannot enter the Kingdom of God in this life. Many religions practice a variety of forms of baptism, but getting wet does not birth you into the Kingdom of God. It is in the sanctified waters that we become citizens of the Kingdom. It is in the sanctified waters that we become “a member and partaker of the death and resurrection of Christ our God.”³⁹

Wherefore, O Lord, manifest thyself in this water, and grant that *he* who is baptized therein may be transformed; that *he* may put away from him the old man, which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh, and that *he* may be clothed upon with the new man, and renewed after the image of Him who created *him*; that being buried, after the pattern of thy death, in baptism, *he* may, in like manner, be a partaker of the Resurrection...⁴⁰

The baptism in water is followed immediately with the anointing with oil for the baptism in the Holy Spirit in which we are “sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit he cannot in this life enter the Kingdom of God.

THE TREE OF LIFE

The first sentence of the Troparion of the Advent Paraklesis tells us Eden has been opened for all. But listen to the whole Troparion—

³⁹ Ektenia, Orthodox Baptism Service.

⁴⁰ The Baptismal Prayer.

Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden hath been opened for all. Prepare, O Ephratha, for the Tree of Life hath blossomed forth in the cave from the Virgin. For her womb did appear as a super-sensual paradise in which is planted that holy Vine; if we should eat thereof we shall live and not die as Adam of old. Christ shall be born, raising the image that fell at the beginning.

Not only has Eden been opened, but the Tree of Life has blossomed forth from the Virgin's womb.

Remember that God placed the cherubim around the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden lest Adam and Eve and fallen humanity would reach out our hands to eat from it. But now in restoring Paradise to us God also opens access to the Tree of Life.

Mary's womb, again we speak in metaphors, was super-sensual, was above and beyond what the five senses can know. Mary's womb was a physical womb, but it was also so much more. The restoration of our access to Paradise is the restoration of our access to the Tree of Life... if we shall eat thereof we shall live and not die.

IF I BE LIFTED UP

Jesus said that even as Moses lifted up the pole with a brass snake on it, that so too he would be lifted up.⁴¹ He said that when he was lifted up that we would know who he was.⁴² And then he said this, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me."⁴³

⁴¹ John 3: 14

⁴² John 8:28

⁴³ John 12:32

Three times Christ has mentioned being lifted up. The first time like a snake on a pole refers to his crucifixion, to be lifted upon from the earth on a cross. This is where some get the idea of a crucifix, the body of Christ on the Cross. But Christ has more in mind than just his historical-physical crucifixion.

In the Divine Liturgy we offer the bread and wine. They are lifted up to God. “Thine own of thine own, we offer unto thee in behalf of all and for all.” We ask God to send down his Holy Spirit upon us and the bread and the wine and to change them into the body and blood of Christ. There could be no body and blood in the Chalice had the Word not become flesh and dwelt among us. There could be no Mystical Incarnation in the Chalice had there been no Incarnation in Bethlehem.

Christ said, If I be lifted up I will draw all mankind unto me. He was lifted up in crucifixion and people have been drawn, have gathered to hear the message of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

God said, I will meet you at the place of mercy, between the wings of the Cherubim. In the Invisible Presence of the Resurrected Christ in the Chalice, we have lifted him up between the wings of the cherubim, and people have been drawn to the church, have gathered to mystically represent the cherubim and the angelic hosts as we jointly and in common accord worshipped our God.

But Christ is the Tree of Life. If we should eat thereof we shall live and not die. Jesus said he is the bread of life. He said,

“I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever.”⁴⁴

Many of those who heard Christ shook their heads in disbelief. They were still living in the world of Death. They had not yet seen the Kingdom. They did not know the way to the Tree of Life was open before them.

We believe in the mystical presence of Christ in the Chalice. His body is mystically present in the bread. His blood is mystically present in the wine. The bread still looks like bread, and the wine still looks like wine. The Incarnation in the Chalice is the same as the Incarnation in the flesh. Christ looked like a man. He was fully God *and* fully Man. He was both, two natures in one person, at the same time. This is also true in the Chalice. This is truly his body and this is truly bread. This is truly his blood and this is truly wine.

Many today shake their heads in disbelief at the Mystical Presence of Christ in the Chalice. They have walked away, some even offering pieces of candy bars and Coca-Cola in place of

⁴⁴ John 6:53-58

bread and wine. Christ turned to those who remained, and asked if we are deserting him also. Peter replied for all of us, “Lord, to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life.”⁴⁵

I WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME

Jesus said, If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me. Lifted up upon the Cross historically? Yes! Lifted up invisibly present in the Chalice? Yes! Christ has drawn us to his Cross. He has drawn us to his Church. But he said I will draw all unto *me*.

The goal of creation is a relationship with God himself, not a relationship with a cross or a crucifix. Not even a relationship with his Church. The goal of creation is a relationship with God himself. If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me.

Immediately before Jesus said he was the bread of life, he said, “No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”⁴⁶ Christ is lifted up on the Cross, and the Father draws us to the Cross. Christ is lifted up in the Chalice at the altar, and the Father draws us to the Church. But Christ is the Tree of Life, and he says that he will draw all of us to him.

The last event, the last act of the Divine Liturgy before the receiving of the Eucharist, is the invitation to receive. The Deacon stands in the holy doors facing the people with the Chalice, containing the Body and Blood of Christ our God, with the Chalice lifted up he says, “With fear of God and faith and love, *draw* near.” If I be lifted up... *draw* near! Receive the Bread of

⁴⁵ John 6:68.

⁴⁶ John 6:44.

Life. Receive the Tree of Life. All those living in the world of Life, come receive the Life of God.

“Take, eat: this is my Body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of this all of you: this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Having in remembrance, therefore, this saving commandment”⁴⁷

... the saving commandment to eat and drink the Bread and the Wine, the Body and Blood that Christ gives us, it is a saving commandment to eat and drink of the Body and Blood of Christ.

With the fear of God, and faith and love, draw near to Christ in the Chalice, Take: eat and drink all of you of this.

The way to Paradise has been restored. Eden is opened for all. The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us. The Second Person of the Trinity had a Second Nativity in space and time and became man. The goal of the Incarnation does not stop at the Crucifixion, nor does it stop at the Resurrection. The goal of the Incarnation is achieved when we personally receive the Body and Blood of Christ. It is Christ in us, the hope of glory.⁴⁸

THAT WE MIGHT BECOME LIKE GOD

Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repentance is not the end. It is the beginning. Getting baptized and joining the Church is not the end. It is only the beginning. All of our life is prelude to entering the Kingdom of God. We have stepped out of death into life. And our life is just beginning.

⁴⁷ The Anaphora, the Divine Liturgy, Antiochian Red Service Book.

⁴⁸ Colossians 1:27

We are now citizens of Paradise. We stand where Adam and Eve stood before their lunch with the Snake in the Garden. They had life and chose death. Through the grace and act of God we have gained entrance once more to Paradise. Paradise was lost but now it has been regained.

The call and purpose of God remain. We have likeness-ability so that we might become like God. The Church is where the invisible Kingdom of God is most easily visible for us. We live all week in the dead empirical world. We forget we are citizens of Paradise. We forget we are living in the midst of the seen and the unseen. Step one is to come to church. Pay attention. Be reminded the Undivided Trinity along with the angelic hosts and our departed loved ones are invisibly present during the Liturgy.

Know that Christ meant it when he said, If I be lifted up, I will draw you unto me. When the Christ in the Chalice is lifted up, and we are invited, commanded, to draw near, come. Week after week, come. Receive the life of God into you.

Christ in you, the hope of glory.⁴⁹ Meet with God at his appointed place, his chalice. Walk with God in the cool of the evening. Allow God to be God in your life. Little by little, as you live out your life, the miracle of *theosis* will occur, we will become like God.

Christ did not come to condemn the world. The world of Death is condemned already. Christ came that the world could be restored to Life.⁵⁰ “I have come that you might have life, and might have it abundantly.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Colossians 1:27

⁵⁰ John 3:17

⁵¹ John 10:10

Repent and believe. This is the Evangelion. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand. This is the Evangelion that is the power of God unto salvation.

What must we do to be saved from living in death? Repent, believe, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.