

# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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## BABYLON AND THE TREES OF PENTECOST

Fr. Stephen Freeman

### *From the Feast of Pentecost*

*The arrogance of building the tower in the days of old led to the confusion of tongues. Now the glory of the knowledge of God brings them wisdom. There God condemned the impious for their transgression. Here Christ has enlightened the fishermen by the Spirit. There disharmony was brought about for punishment. Now harmony is renewed for the salvation of our souls.*

The first time I saw trees in an Orthodox Church was at St. Tikhon's Monastery in Pennsylvania, just after Pentecost Sunday. I was completely caught off guard. Though I had been in a number of different Churches over the years, I had never been in a parish of Russian background for the feast of Pentecost. Thus I had missed the Slavic practice of bringing trees into Church for the feast of Pentecost. It was wonderful – like going into Church only to find a forest.

Holy Resurrection at Pentecost, 1 My Western background left me completely unprepared for this Eastern take on the feast of the gift of the Spirit to the Church. In Western Churches, Pentecost particularly focuses on the “fire” of the Holy Spirit lighting on the disciples in the upper room and the “empowerment” of the Church for mission. Traditionally in the West, the color of the feast is red (for the fire).

In the East, the color of the feast is green – which is also the color worn for the feast days of monastic saints. In the West, green is the “ordinary” color worn in the “in between” Sundays and weekdays of the Calendar. For the Orthodox, gold serves this function.

But I found myself in the midst of trees on a major feast that was “green.” I was simply baffled.

In Russian practice the feast is normally referred to as the feast of the Trinity (Troitsa) rather than Pentecost, or “Pentecost” is listed as an afterthought (Pentecost). It is obvious that something quite different is at work in the understanding of the feast day.

Both East and West keep the feast as the day upon which the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles. Orthodoxy does not ignore the various tongues with which the Apostles began to speak as they announced the gospel to those assembled in Jerusalem. However, as noted in the verse quoted at the beginning of this article – those tongues are seen as a spiritual counterpart to the confusion of the tower of Babel, when men in their hubris sought to build a tower into heaven. The tongues which came upon them only proclaimed darkness and confusion and brought to an end the last great ecumenical effort of humanity.

The Church is God's vision of united mankind – a union achieved through the gift of God and not by human effort. It is a union which maintains a diversity of sorts (the languages do not become one “super” language – so much for the “unity” of Latin) but a diversity whose unity is found in true union with the one, living and true God. The gospel proclaimed by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, though preached in many languages, was one and the same gospel.

One may still wonder why the feast becomes a feast of the Trinity. Like the feast of Theophany (the Baptism of Christ), Pentecost is a feast in which the revelation of the Holy Trinity is made manifest. The Spirit is the gift of the Father – given through the Son. There were many centuries that passed before a parish was named for the Trinity.

Among the first within the Orthodox world was the Lavra (Monastery) of the Holy Trinity outside of Moscow, founded by St. Sergius in the 14th century. His vision of the common life was seen as an earthly icon of the Divine Life of the Holy Trinity in which each of the Divine

Persons shared a common life. The monastery was itself a place of spiritual rebirth for the Russian land as it began to come out from under the oppression of the Tatar yoke. The spiritual life of Holy Trinity monastery was a spiritual awakening for the land when Russians remembered that they were brothers of one another and shared a common life. This common life became the strength that allowed them to assert their freedom.

Of course, all of the above is both interesting and true but has yet to explain the trees. The Jewish feast of Pentecost (fifty days after the Passover) marks the beginning of the harvest feast. The first-fruits of the harvest are brought to the temple to be blessed of God. For Christians the harvest that is sought is the harvest of a renewed humanity and the renewal of creation. Thus the trees are a representation of the created order, assembled together with the people of God, awaiting and receiving the gift of the Spirit through whom everything is made new.

It is a very rich feast – one that is filled with meaning (as is appropriate). But all of the meaning takes as its source the gift to creation of the “Lord and Giver of Life,” the Holy Spirit. Just as we are told in Genesis:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

With a word, God speaks, and where the Spirit hovered, life comes forth.

So it is in the life of the Church and in creation today. Where God speaks, renewed life comes forth. All of creation groans and travails, awaiting the final great Word that will signal the renewal of all things. For now, we see that promise foreshadowed by trees in Church and green on the priests and by the joy of our hearts.

*From: <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2010/05/21/babylon-and-the-trees-of-pentecost-2/>*



## ORTHOPRAXIS REVIEW THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

For the sign of The Cross of Our Lord, we put the fingers of our right hand together as follows. We bring the tips of the first three fingers together (the thumb, index and middle ones), and bend the last two (the “ring” and little fingers) against the palm.



The first three fingers together express our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, as the Trinity one in essence and indivisible, and the two fingers bent show how the Son of God, when He came down from Heaven, being God, became man; that is, they signify His two natures - divine and human.

In order to make the sign of the Cross, with our fingers in this position, we touch our forehead, for the blessing of our mind, our stomach, for the blessing of our internal feelings, then our right and left shoulders, for the blessing of our bodily strength.

The sign of the Cross gives us great strength to repel and conquer evil and to do good, but we must remember to make the sign of the Cross correctly and without haste, otherwise it will not be the sign of the Cross, but just waving our hand around, which only gladdens the demons. By making the sign of the Cross carelessly we show a lack of reverence for God.

We make the sign of the Cross, or “cross ourselves,” at the beginning of prayer, during prayer, at the end of prayer, and when we draw near to anything holy: when we enter the church, when we reverence the Cross or an icon. We



should cross ourselves at every important moment in our life: in danger, in sorrow, in joy, and so on.

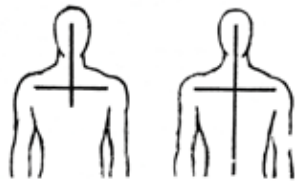
When we cross ourselves, mentally we say, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Thus we express our faith in the All-holy Trinity and our desire to live and labor for the glory of God. The word "amen" means in truth, truly, let it be so, so be it.

*Adapted from The Law of God, Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1966. pp. 23-24.*

### CUSTOMS SOME FOLLOW

There are some who consider that the sign of the Cross is properly made with the body straight, and one only inclines the head or bows, after it is complete, who consider that bowing while making the Sign of the Cross "breaks" the Cross. This custom is not followed by all.

There are some also who consider that the vertical part of the Sign of the Cross is made properly by touching the forehead and then the stomach, *not the chest*, because the figure of the Cross made by touching the chest makes it "upside down." Again, this is a custom that not all follow.



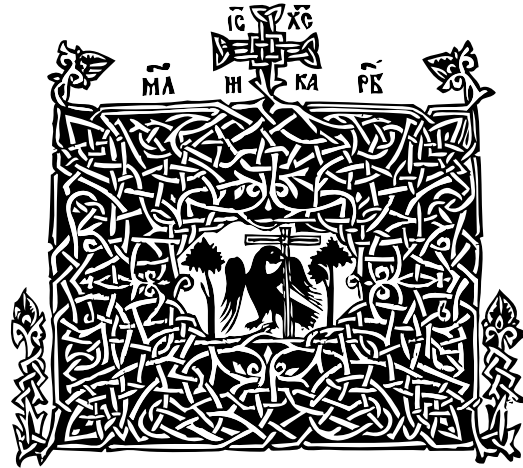
### BOWING, WITH OR WITHOUT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

A "bow at the waist," or *metania* is made by bending the upper body at the waist, while keeping the lower body erect and the knees locked. As the bow is being made, the right hand is simultaneously extended down to the ground. When a "bow at the waist" is performed in conjunction with the sign of the cross, it is made after the sign of the cross has been completed.

The basic ideological difference between a *metania* and a prostration is this:

✙ A *metania* without the Sign of the Cross is used to show respect (such as in greetings), and *with* the Sign of the Cross for purposes of veneration.

✙ A *prostration* without the Sign of the Cross is used to express deep humility (such as asking forgiveness), and with the Sign of the Cross for worship.



### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Moleben on our property:** We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

**Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers:** The Sisterhood will meet at 6:30PM on Tuesday, June 18.

**Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross!** Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



### FINANCIAL SUMMARY

May	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$9,574	\$12,917
Expense	\$9,707	\$11,104

# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 6 PM Great Vespers
2 <b>Blind Man</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	3	4	5 6:30PM Great Vespers	6 <b>ASCENSION</b> 8AM Divine Liturgy	7 10AM Prayers at the Property	8 6 PM Great Vespers
9 <b>Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	10	11 6:30PM Inquirers' Class	12 7:30 Choir Rehearsal	13	14 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Yard Sale Prep	15 6AM Yard Sale 6 PM Great Vespers
16 <b>PENTECOST</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 1PM Kneeling Vespers	17	18 6:30PM Sisterhood	19	20	21 10AM Prayers at the Property	22 6 PM Great Vespers
23 <b>All Saints</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	24 Apostles' Fast	25 Apostles' Fast 6:30PM Inquirers' Class	26 Apostles' Fast	27 Apostles' Fast 7PM Men's Group	28 Apostles' Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	29 <b>Sts. Peter &amp; Paul</b> 8AM Ordination of Reader Daniel Johnson in SC NO Great Vespers
30 <b>All Saints of America</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy						

