



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There are several important events in the life of our church during September. Just as we celebrate our secular New Year on January 1st and make New Year's resolutions, so too does our Holy Orthodox Church celebrate the Liturgical Church New Year on September 1/14.

For anyone who might be confused by the two dates, the first date is according to the "New" or Gregorian (civil) Calendar and the second date is according to the Julian ("Old") Calendar. For example the date for Christmas would be shown as December 25/January 7. Western heterodox churches (Protestant & Catholic, etc.) as well as some Orthodox Churches who follow the New Calendar, use the civil calendar date of December

25th as the day to celebrate Christmas, while Orthodox Churches on the Old Calendar observe the Feast of the Nativity on the civil date of January 7.

This is because an error was made many centuries ago and gradually calendars in different parts of the world drifted apart. In an attempt to fix this problem, in 1582 the Roman Catholic Pope Gregory XIII initially ordered that the calendar be advanced by 10 days (sort of like when we set our clocks ahead or back for daylight savings time). Over the next several hundred years, other adjustments were made so that the "Gregorian" calendar (named after Pope Gregory XIII) became the standard civil calendar throughout the western world and is now 13 days apart from the Julian "Old" Calendar.

In 1582, the Orthodox Church did not adopt the Roman Catholic Gregorian Calendar. However, in 1923 the Greek Archbishop Meletius mandated the use of the Gregorian Calendar for the Greek Orthodox Church, despite much protest from Mt. Athos and other Orthodox Churches. Since that time, several other Orthodox jurisdictions have also adopted the New Calendar. However, the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Church, monks on Mt. Athos and others have continued using the Old Calendar. Unfortunately, this has created much discord amongst Orthodox churches around the world. Nevertheless, it is a situation that we must deal with in our times as best we can in a Christian spirit of brotherly love.

On September 8/21, we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God. One of the 12 Great Feasts of our Liturgical Year, it has been observed that the Orthodox Liturgical Year practically begins with this feast and ends with Her Holy Dormition or Falling Asleep. As we read in the Synaxarion for this Feast: “The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos was the fruit of the prayer of Her pious parents, Sts. Joachim and Anna...God in His wisdom showed the barrenness of human nature before the coming of Christ, by leaving Joachim and Anna childless until they were very old. One feast day they went to the Temple to present their offerings, but someone turned to them and said, ‘You are not allowed to offer with us, because you have no child.’ These words cut them to the heart. Returning home, St. Joachim went up to the desert, to pray alone, and St. Anna at home was shedding abundant tears and fervently imploring Heaven. They both promised God that the child He would give them they would dedicate to Him. God Who is rich in mercy and full of compassion heard their entreaties and sent to Anna the Archangel Gabriel, who announced that she would conceive in her old age and bear a child, who would be the praise of the whole earth. When nine months had passed, Anna gave birth to the Holy Theotokos, Who at the age of three was dedicated to the Temple by Her Holy parents.

The Universal Exaltation of the Precious Cross (September 14/27). In the 20th year of the reign of St. Constantine the Great (326 A.D.), Constantine sent his mother St. Helen to Jerusalem to venerate the Holy

Places and to find the site of the Holy Sepulchre and of the Holy Cross....St. Helen found the precious Cross with the crosses on which the two thieves had hung, but she could see no way of telling which was the Cross of Christ. The resurrection of a corpse being carried to burial at the touch of the Holy Wood enabled St. Macarius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, to identify the Cross of Christ, for no miracle was worked by the other two crosses. Because the people who had gathered in large numbers at the place wanted at least to see from afar the instrument of our Redemption, the Holy Patriarch mounted the ambo and taking the Cross in his hands, raised it on high so that all could see it. Another of the 12 Great Feasts, the Exaltation of the Cross celebrates not only the memory of this event, but also shows forth this instrument of shame as having become an image of our Lord's victory over death. (from the Synaxarion)

Let us participate as much as possible in these Holy Feasts that are given to us for our benefit, as this is pleasing to God and we will receive His blessing. God bless you!

In Christ, +Fr. Gregory