

# THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2013

## THE WORD

There is an interesting debate in philosophy over language and I suppose it is one of those chicken-and-egg arguments: which came first, the concept or the word. I think it is possible, on the whole, to have an idea in ones head without being able to name it. Afterall, I presume that language first developed because of the necessity to name things, rather than by words occurring on their own to define the objects around our primitive ancestors. What is also fascinating, is how certain nations and languages can have words for things of which others know nothing. Leaving aside the remark attributed to President G.W. Bush *that the problem with the French is that they have no word for entrepreneur*, it is true that we often take words from foreign languages into our own when they seem to hit the nail on the head with just the right force. French, of course, has supplied English with many a useful phrase, though some, like *savoir faire*, appear to be used merely to show off a knowledge of French when the English term, *know-how* can be used perfectly well in its place. This reminds me of a true story of some EU committee or other in Brussels which in a document, referred to the ability of the people of Normandy in France to get things done and their obvious gifts in the management of their own affairs. This gift was described by the committee as *la sagesse normande*. When translated into English, the members of the committee from the UK fell about laughing, much to the annoyance of the French speakers. The unfortunate translation of this phrase *la sagesse normande*, turned

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out as *Norman Wisdom* ....the name of a late British comedian known for playing the part of a bungling fool, prone to disasters!

Living in a fallen world we know that it is always prone to disasters but likewise, therein lies the root of comedy. All good drama, reflecting the ups and downs of human life is described as either tragedy or comedy and so much of it comes from our use of words. For good or ill, our experience of life is firmly linked to our use and no doubt, abuse of words.

In our understanding of Christianity there is an obvious place for the Word of God. This we regard, unlike human words, as infallible. The concept of the Word in Christianity has many meanings and perhaps, that is part of the problem for people can have differing paradigms in mind. So *the Word* can mean Christ Himself, the message of the gospel, the Bible or even general Christian teaching as in a homily or sermon. But even the understanding of these ideas can vary, depending on the type of Christianity in question. For us as Orthodox, for example, the Holy Scriptures are the word of God but not as understood as, say, in the Protestant traditions. For us, the content of the Bible, as a canon of holy writings, was decided by the bishops of the Orthodox-Catholic Church in the late fourth century. The Bible is seen as a witness to the revelation of God to Man but it is not the revelation itself. This is an important distinction. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we believe that the Fathers of

the Church were able to discern which books were to be included in scripture and which rejected. This places the Bible as being *within* Holy Tradition whereas, for Protestants, it is the sole source of teaching set *over* the Church as a guide to everything in matters of faith. Such guidance is ours as well but the difference comes in the matter of interpretation. In Protestantism anyone may interpret the Word of God; in Orthodoxy, however, it is always interpreted according to and in the spirit of the tradition of the Fathers who gathered the books in the first place. It is worth remembering here that the Nicene Creed, formulated by the Council of Nicea (325AD) and Constantinole (381AD), does not mention belief in the Bible for the simple reason that the canon had not been settled - what was at stake was the fundamental understanding of Christ as the Word, of the same essence (nature) and co-eternal with God the Father. Here, the concept and paradigm came, historically, before the words of scriptures which affirmed, as a witness, the Orthodox teaching. At one time, mainstream Protestants would have adhered to the teachings of the first four ecumenical councils but, sadly, today, that is not necessarily the case. So when we talk of Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the co-eternal Word who became flesh, one person in two natures, both God and Man, we know what we are talking about. Yet someone outside of the Orthodox faith might have an entirely different idea in their head, using the same word, *Christ*.

When St. John wrote his gospel he used the opening of the Torah as his model for his starting passage. Just as *Genesis* has *In the beginning*, so the blessed apostles has the same opening. His written witness to the Christian Word or message starts with The Word (Logos) in the beginning. Scholars of religious philosophy know that St. John might well have been drawing on ideas current among Jews of the Greek speaking Diaspora as well as the ancient concept of the word of God as the Torah. Yet he gives it a unique meaning, one that could only come through the life-changing encounter with The Word Himself. Here, Torah, the Law of Israel, has been shown as a person, Jesus of Nazareth and this Word *was God*.

We start this month with the celebration of the feast of Theophany, the revelation of God. This means that explicitly, at his baptism, Christ was revealed together with the Father and the Spirit at the Jordan River. This is a part of what has been handed on to us in Holy Tradition. God does not reveal everything of Himself, for we should be dazzled; no one can look upon God and live. He has only revealed what we need to know for salvation but this idea, this word, this Person of the Son, is and has been forever. It is the task of all theology to put this into words. And not only words, of course, for we have the holy mysteries as well. Each time we celebrate the feast, each time we consecrate afresh the waters, we are present at the Jordan with Christ and we witness the revelation of God for ourselves. Every time we bless our homes with the holy water, we claim that territory for the kingdom of God. Every person and object we bless is sprinkled with water over which was recited the beautiful prayer of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, surely, one of the most exquisite prayers in all our liturgical texts.

Here, the simple water that comes from our taps, receives the word of God and itself is revealed as bearing the Word. Here, the most basic form of matter, the stuff on which our biological life depends, is manifested in its true symbolic significance as the giver of Life eternal; the same that Photini, the Samaritan woman drew, not from Jacob's Well but from the encounter with the Master Himself.



At the end of the prayer at the Great Blessing of the Waters, the priest immerses a cross three times into the font during which the troparion of the day is sung. This action manifests and demonstrates openly the revelation of the Holy Trinity just as when Jesus Christ came up out of the water after his baptism:

*When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness unto Thee, calling Thee the beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove, confirmed His word as sure and steadfast. O Christ our God who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee!*



## SERVICES

*Vespers* is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards. The *Proskomedie* is served at 9.00am and *Orthros* before the Liturgy at 9.30am.

## JANUARY

Sun 6<sup>th</sup> HOLY THEOPHANY  
Matins 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
and Great Blessing of Waters  
10.30am

Sat 12<sup>th</sup> No Vespers (Deanery  
Clergy meeting, London)

Sun 13<sup>th</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> After Pentecost  
Matins 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

Sun 20<sup>th</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> After Pentecost  
Matins 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

Sun 27<sup>th</sup> 34<sup>th</sup> After Pentecost  
Sunday of Zacchaeus Matins  
9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

## FEBRUARY

Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> MEETING OF THE LORD

Sun 3<sup>rd</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> After Pentecost  
Matins 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

Sun 10<sup>th</sup> 36<sup>th</sup> After Pentecost  
Sunday of the Talents  
Matins. 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

Sun 17<sup>th</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> After Pentecost  
Sunday of the Canaanite Woman  
Matins 9.30am Divine Liturgy  
10.30am

Sun 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Publican  
and the Pharisee Beginning of  
the Troïdion Matins 9.30am  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

