

THE EASTERN
119: December 2019

ЦЕРКОВЬ СВТ. ИОАННА
ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN
Military Road, Colchester,

His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch
Russias

Most Rev. Metropolitan
the Church Outside Russia

Rt. Rev. Bishop Irenei, Bishop of Richmond and Western Europe

www.orthodox-europe.org



ORTHODOX No

ШАНХАЙСКОГО
ORTHODOX CHURCH
Essex CO1 2AN

of Moscow and All the

Hilarion, First Hierarch of

The Church of St John of Shanghai, built in 1855, is the largest Russian Orthodox church building in the British Isles and is attended by 3,000 Orthodox of 24 nationalities, with some 100 baptisms per year. It is a parish of the East of England Orthodox Church Trust (Charity No: 1081707), part of the Russian Orthodox Church, comprising Colchester, Norwich, Wisbech and Bury St Edmunds, looking after faithful Orthodox in the East of England.

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Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE2T2sYTy8s>

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Расписание Богослужений / Timetable of Services

Sunday 1 December

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Tuesday 3 December

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Wednesday 4 December

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия праздника Введения во храм Пресвятой Богородицы.

Saturday 7 December

No Vigil / Всенощного бдения нет: служба в Нориче

Sunday 8 December

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия.

Saturday 14 December

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 15 December

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Thursday 19 December. St Nicholas the Wonderworker / Свт. Николай Чудотворец

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 21 December

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 22 December

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 28 December

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 29 December

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Baptisms in November

3 November: David Omar

3 November: Matei Mitoseru

7 November: Nikolas Crasmaru

9 November: Eva Tannac

9 November: Larisa Pitiaoi

9 November: Giuliano Pitigo

9 November: Maria Sheveriova

10 November: Maria Rotaru

15 November: Nikolas Stamarin

16 November: Mihail Dolgov

16 November: Anastasia Dolgova

30 November: Antonia Varga

30 November: Pavel Onica

Wedding in November

24 November: Valeriu and Maria Guscin

Church News – IMPORTANT!

Bishop Irenei is going to visit us next year on Sunday 19 January and Saturday 4 July.

On 19 January, which is Theophany, God willing, Vladyka will tonsure a reader. This will also be the 35th anniversary of Fr Andrew's ordination to serve at the altar.

On 4 July, which is our patronal feast, God willing, Vladyka together with an old friend, Bishop Alexander of Vevey, will consecrate our church – we have been waiting for ten years. Another new reader will also be tonsured. We are expecting many guests.

A RARE VIRTUE—ON WHY MANY OF US SHOW NO GRATITUDE

Priest Dimitry Vydumkin

*“Everybody receives abundant blessings from God,
but only a few give thanks to Him.”¹*

About two centuries ago, [St. Ignatius \(Brianchaninov\)](#) expressed a very deplorable moral constant which was revealed to him by his spiritual experience, “Gratitude is a rare virtue among people.”² It is enough to look closely at the state of morals in the society we live in to understand that it is a constant and not a variable quantity. We can't look into someone's inner world and “measure” with a “ruler” his ability to thank, and we don't need to. Some indirect indicators are sufficient to conclude that a considerable part (if not the best part) of our society has been infected with “pathological” ingratitude. I am first of all speaking of banal callousness in its ever more terrifying manifestations, people's ever-increasing dissatisfaction with their lives and an ever more intensive desire to “roll themselves up into balls” like prickly hedgehogs.

“What has this to do with ingratitude?” you may ask. The fact is that the soul's ability to be grateful is an effective antidote for such diseases. Someone with a grateful heart, receiving never-ceasing favors from God and his neighbors, naturally shows favor to others; such people are more than happy with their lives and won't be preoccupied with their own problems. In contrast with this, the ungrateful heart will make someone view everything from a very different perspective...

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to Timothy warns us: *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be proud..., unthankful...* (2

Tim. 3:1-2). Pathological ingratitude, which can be found everywhere and in some cases (careerism) is becoming a norm, is a clear sign of the end times. Perhaps the most hideous manifestation of ingratitude, when someone cruelly pays for a benefaction he has received with evil, was widespread even 200 years ago, as St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) wrote: “Those who receive great favors often begin to feel seething, frenzied hatred for their benefactors. This unnatural oddity occurs so often that a popular proverb appeared: ‘You will not make an enemy before feeding him and giving him to drink.’”³² What can we say about our time? What about children who send their parents to old age homes or simply turn them out into the street like lumber? Take frequent cases when others make use of your gullibility and unselfishness to get you into trouble “as a token of their gratitude”. And take the numerous cases when someone who has gotten used to your benefaction begins to demand favors from you frantically, and if you can’t show him favors anymore, you become an “offender” in his eyes.

Why do such things happen and how can we interpret extreme ingratitude? Ingratitude is a defect of self-understanding, and by the virtue of this defect someone has a distorted view of the world around him. An ungrateful person is like someone who sits in a room that has windows smeared with dirt. This person can’t see or feel the sunshine—he only feels that it’s dark and cold. What can he be grateful for?



Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? (Lk. 17:17)

The reason for this spiritual state when someone's heart is not even warmed up by the generous "sunshine" is explained by his view of himself. Pride, the root of all spiritual diseases, "smears" the human heart with the "dirt" of an exaggerated high opinion of themselves. Pride tells him that not only is he "worthy" of everything he receives from God and other people, he is also worthy of many other and better things; so he feels disappointed and thinks that it is unjust that he hasn't yet received these "best things". Hence his inability to give thanks, for he is "worthy" of everything he enjoys; hence his discontent with all he has, for he is "worthy of better"! Indeed, "the share of a madman is small in his eyes."⁴ Meanwhile, life shows that by thinking in this way he deceives himself. Thus, entrapped by self-delusion, the one who is incapable of thanking hides himself from the "sunshine" of Divine grace and loses what is really best. As opposed to this, a grateful person always receives beyond expectation, for a thankful heart is a receptacle of Divine gifts. This is what the Gospel story of the healing of ten lepers by the Lord is about (cf. Lk. 17:12–19).

This episode is one of the few places in the Holy Scriptures which speaks about the need for the ability to be grateful. More than that, the Lord shows here that gratitude to God is a demonstration of someone's true faith in God—the faith that saves and attracts God's mercy to him.

One day, as Christ was entering one village, ten lepers were on His way. They were standing at a distance and dared not approach Him, since lepers were not allowed to be in contact with other people and were treated as social pariahs. Having heard about Christ's arrival, they shouted loudly from a distance, "Jesus, Teacher, have mercy on us!" But the Lord didn't heal the lepers in public: He sent them to their priests so that they could confirm their cure as true. Indeed they were cleansed on their way, but only one of them returned to Christ and, falling at His feet, gave praise to God. This man turned out to be a Samaritan—a member of the "unfaithful" and "alien" ethnic group whom the Jews shunned and weren't on speaking terms with. The Lord said in reply: *Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God... Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole* (Lk. 17:17-19).

There are no coincidences in this episode, every detail is filled with deep meaning. Let us examine at least some of them.

On the importance of gratitude

Let us start with the action related to our subject. Soon after Christ had sent the ten lepers away, all of them saw they were healed. Did they go to the priests as Jesus had told them? They probably did because they couldn't re-enter society unless they first went to the priest to be checked. But did they return to Christ to thank Him for this great miracle? Alas, only one of them came. According to the Holy Fathers, thus the Lord showed us the proportion of the grateful to the ungrateful among people. This is what St. Theophan the Recluse wrote about this: "Ten lepers were healed, but only one came to thank the Lord. Isn't there generally a similar proportion of people who are grateful after receiving benefactions from the Lord? Who has not received good things; or, rather, what do we have in us, or what ever happens to us that is not good for us? Even so, is everyone grateful to God, and does everyone give thanks for everything?"⁵ Agreeing with St. Theophan that not many of us show gratitude and not for everything, let us ask another question: Why is the ability to show gratitude so important? Who needs our gratitude? God? He certainly doesn't need it because He is all-good and all-sufficient. People? But people who strive for goodness and sincerely do charitable acts without mercenary motives don't need gratitude either. Who needs it then? Of course, **it is we who need it**; for only a grateful heart can respond to the good it receives properly, which guarantees future blessings. Only a grateful heart is the receptacle of multifarious gifts from God, and the Creator awaits our gratitude only in order to give us more blessings. St. Ignatius writes: "The gratitude of the receiver of gifts encourages the giver to give more gifts which are greater than the previous ones. The gifts are not multiplied only when there is no gratitude for them."⁶ There is a famous saying of St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, "God does not need your gratitude, but you desperately need His blessings. Your grateful heart receives and preserves these benefactions." Only a grateful heart can pray for future blessings with boldness, "for how should he ask for future things, who is not thankful for the past?" (St. John Chrysostom).

In other words, the ability to show gratitude is a "generator" of God's blessings in our lives. Apart from this, this ability can serve as a strong weapon in our spiritual warfare. Specifically, against the sin of envy, as St. John Chrysostom wrote: "Let us be thankful for the benefactions that have been granted not only to us but also to others; thus we will be able to both destroy envy and strengthen love, making it most sincere. You will no longer be able to envy those for whom you thank the Lord... Such gratitude releases us from earth, resettles us in heaven and makes us angels."

How should we show gratitude?

True, the overwhelming majority of us understand that we should show gratitude to God and people for the benefactions we receive. But how are we supposed to express gratitude? Are simple words of appreciation and a smile on our faces sufficient? Perhaps a grateful heart won't be satisfied with this and will try to repay good with good. A believer will at least pray

for his benefactor. But any benefactor is just an instrument in the hands of God; so the following question inevitably arises: How can we show gratitude to God Who is Himself the source of all good things and doesn't need anything?

Sacrifices were the original form of gratitude to God. Beginning from the first human beings and later throughout the history of the chosen people we see the faithful offer blood sacrifices. Thus, *Abel... brought of the firstlings of his flock* (Gen. 4:4). *Noah... offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savor...* (Gen. 8:20-21). Sacrifices were performed in the Temple of Solomon and continued in the time of the Savior. However, the Old Testament sacrifices had a prefigurative meaning: In addition to the expression of gratitude they reflected the faith in the coming of the Savior—the True Sacrifice for the world. After the coming of the Messiah, blood sacrificial offerings lost their purpose, including that of gratitude. Long before the incarnation of Christ, King David prophetically pointed to the form of gratitude which can replace all blood sacrifices and would always be pleasing to God: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 50:19). Repentance for our sins and a remorseful heart are the required form of gratitude, along with praise of God for the benefactions we receive. As St. John Chrysostom wrote: “Do you want to know how you should show gratitude? To confess your sins means to give thanks to God; he who confesses his sins shows that he is guilty of innumerable sins but has not yet gotten the punishment he deserves. He thanks God more than everybody else.” Do you want to understand how it works in life? Look how the Patriarch Jacob pours out his gratitude to God in prayer: *God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands* (Gen. 32:9-10). Consequently, when we happen to taste and see that the Lord is good (cf. Ps. 33:9), then, having glorified the Creator for His countless blessings to us, it wouldn't be bad to proclaim together with the Patriarch Jacob: *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant.*

Why should I be thankful for sorrows?

Everybody understands why we must be grateful to God for joys, but the fact that we must give thanks for sorrows and diseases is not clear to everyone. We read in one of St. Paul's epistles, *In every thing give thanks* (1 Thess. 5:18). But we are seething inside when something happens and we are harmed. In such moments, especially if we suffer serious losses, we ask perplexedly: “Why should I be grateful for this if I feel so terrible?”

But even in unenviable situations we shouldn't forget popular wisdom based on the Holy Scriptures and experience: "Whatever God wills is for the best." This truth is confirmed by the New Testament teaching concerning God, which is our most authoritative source. *God is love* (1 Jn. 4:16), we read in the Holy Scriptures. God treats us with love. However, while some need joy or consolation, others need sorrows or illnesses for their salvation. This can be compared to a situation when a doctor sends one patient to a health resort and sends another patient to the operating room, "to go under the knife". This "surgeon's knife" is often the only possible way of saving someone's life. God does the same by sending people sorrows and infirmities for the restoration of their spiritual health. Though people often doubt this in moments of trouble, later the good outcomes of trials give them important experience. There is an interesting parable on how this can work in our lives.

One eminent and wealthy dignitary invited a tutor who was famous for his wisdom to educate his child. When his son grew up enough and acquired riding skills, they went horseback riding together. But during the ride the boy fell and the horse accidentally crushed his arm. The tutor hurried to support the adolescent morally with the words: "Don't worry! Take heart! Glory be to God!" Writhing in pain, the latter replied angrily: "What have you given thanks to God for?! I am now an invalid!" And soon by his father's orders the tutor was sent to prison.

Some time passed. One day the same young man, accompanied by a new tutor, undertook a faraway voyage during which they were captured by a native tribe that practiced human sacrifices. They quickly lit fires, and the tutor was the first to fall victim to the barbarous rite. Now it was the young man's turn. Dozens of hands lifted him over their heads and carried him to the fire. But an unforeseen thing happened: at the moment they were about to sacrifice him, the high priest noticed that his arm was injured. Since their pagan gods demanded sacrifices without defects, the tribe with disgust rejected the young man and drove him away. So he trudged back to his native shores.

This parable reflects an important spiritual truth: Divine providence often allows adversity in our lives, foreseeing the greatest good that will result from it, just as a pure baby is born through severe pain.

God doesn't want us to live in clover our entire lives; He wants to prevent us from ruining our souls for eternity. We should make efforts and realize that it is not possible to reach Paradise by "flying" there "business class", that affliction and maladies are often needed to reach it. Our failure to understand this truth not only removes gratitude from our hearts but also gives rise to the opposite, namely grumbling and indignation. When St. Theophan the Recluse encountered this attitude towards sorrows, he would exhort: "There are even those who permit themselves to ask, 'Why did God give us existence? It would be better for us not to exist.' God gave you existence so that you would be in eternal bliss; He gave you existence

as a gift, as a gift He has furnished you with every means for attaining eternal bliss. The job depends on you: you need only to labor a bit for this. You say, ‘But I have only sorrows, poverty, diseases, misfortunes.’ Well, these are also some of the ways to attain eternal bliss. Be patient. Your entire life is less than a moment compared with eternity. Even if you had to suffer unceasingly your entire life, compared to eternity it is nothing; and you still have moments of consolation. Do not look at the present, but at what is prepared for you in the future, and concern yourself with making yourself worthy of that; then you will not notice the sorrows. They will all be swallowed up by unquestioning hope in eternal consolations, and your lips will never cease to utter thanks⁷.”

Thus, beyond all doubt, our [sorrows](#) and diseases are gifts from God intended to help us attain the heavenly abodes. As with all gifts, they should be followed by thanksgiving. And the Holy Fathers see the proof of our true Christian disposition in gratitude. “If sorrows for Christ are gifts from God made by God to genuine Christians, then they must show their Christianity in practice by gratitude for sorrows, confess and accept the gift of God by showing gratitude for the gift⁸.”

So gratitude to God for sorrows is a duty of the Christians and an indicator of their progress in spiritual life. But not only that. The words of thanksgiving and glorification of God contain an effective remedy for sorrow. This is what St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) writes about the power of influence on us of such simple and familiar words as, “glory to God!”: “‘Glory to God!’ These are powerful words! In sorrowful circumstances, when your heart is beset with thoughts of doubt, faint-heartedness, discontent, and murmuring, force yourself to repeat the words ‘glory to God!’ frequently, unhurriedly and attentively. Those who take this advice with simple hearts and put it into practice when the need arises will experience the wonderful power of glorifying God; they will rejoice at gaining this useful new knowledge and acquiring a weapon against the enemies of souls—such a strong and handy one⁹.”

But that is not all. The Lord said to the thankful Samaritan, *Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole* (Lk. 17:19). Why does the Savior equate thankfulness with faith? Because there is a direct link between these two virtues, and St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) points to it: “Thanksgiving to God has its particular attribute: it gives rise to and strengthens faith and brings us closer to God.” In contrast to this, “ingratitude and disregard of God destroy faith and move us away from God¹⁰.” The faith of the Samaritan appeared and became stronger in the living gratitude to Christ. He saw and felt the things that we so often forget. He learned that this perfect gift—the deliverance from an incurable disease—can come from God alone, and he bowed before God in the person of Christ.

“If something good happens, glorify God, and the good will remain; if something bad happens, glorify God, and the bad will disappear,” St. John Chrysostom used to say. And for him it was not just a beautiful phrase. He would begin every speech by hitting his index finger to his palm and saying: “Glory to God for all things.” He did it all his life, and before his last sigh he uttered the same words, pointing out the undying value of gratitude to God: “On account of the substantial benefit the soul receives through thanking God, He commanded us to practice showing gratitude to Him diligently and cultivating a sense of gratitude to God¹¹.”

We must thank God both for joys and sorrows, for such is the will of God for us, and His will is holy to us. Divine providence and God’s care of human beings boil down to us reaching the haven of the Heavenly Kingdom. It is not bad if we have to face storms and hidden rocks on the way sometimes: the main goal is to reach the haven. However, not many can understand this; alas, the ungrateful are a majority, and they won’t hear these most important words from Christ: *Thy faith hath made thee whole*.

Priest Dimitry Vydumkin
Translated by Dmitry Lapa

Pravlife.org

11/28/2019

¹ The Spiritual Alphabet of Elder Paisios the Athonite. Moscow, 2012. P. 28.

² St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Collected Works*. Vol. 4. Moscow, 2008. P. 359.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. P. 362.

⁵ St. Theophan the Recluse. *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*. The citation source: <http://orthochristian.com/calendar/20161205.html>

⁶ St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Collected Works*. Vol. 4. Moscow, 2008. P. 362.

⁷ St. Theophan the Recluse. *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*. The citation source: <http://orthochristian.com/calendar/20161205.html>

⁸ St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Collected Works*. Vol. 4. Moscow, 2008. P. 361.

⁹ St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov). *Glory to God / Collected Works*. Vol. 1. Moscow, 2008.

[10](#) Ibid. P. 360.

[11](#) Ibid.

HOW TO CONQUER THE PASSION OF SMOKING

[Archpriest George Neifach](#)



No one can say that the passion for smoking is innately present in the human body. Everyone knows that this [passion](#) is extrinsic. But nevertheless every smoker, current or former, knows well how much of a pernicious desire our hearts develop for it; it becomes completely impossible to live without it.

The priest that was my spiritual guide at the beginning stages of my Christian life had previously been a long-time smoker. And he, in turn, had traveled many times to the [Pskov-Caves monastery](#). There, one of the Pskov-Caves monks, a well-known spiritual

father, [Archimandrite Adrian](#), told him: “You will learn how to fight with this passion and as a result will get a lesson on how to fight with every other passion”. And he told him to rely mainly on prayer; to lament over this passion, repent, confess and ask God to deliver him from it.

Later on this priest would say: “I really did learn a good deal here, because no matter how hard I tried, no matter how many different methods of abstinence I tried to apply, everything ended up being vain. I had come to an understanding of my infirmity: when it seemed that I was just about to attain victory, then suddenly, like a little kid, I would again fall captive to this passion. I gained an understanding of how feeble our own strength is, how powerless it is without God. I understood the danger of smoking when I would say: ‘there, I’ve quit’; and then a day or two later would again fall captive to this passion with the same intensity as before. And then, finally, I gained an understanding of the power of patient prayer and the all-powerful help of God. I tried unsuccessfully to fight on my own, but sooner or later this always ended in me being defeated. However, I did not give up repenting and praying. And then, in the end, the passion suddenly left me on its own, as if I had never had it, as if I had never been a heavy smoker”. For this reason from the very outset he guided me in a similar fashion.

The advice he gave me at the time pleased me immensely. He said, "Don't do anything, but before you smoke, always say 'Lord, have mercy!' forty times". Usually it's advised that each day you smoke less than the previous day, while smoking the first cigarette later and later each time. But this agonizing struggle, when you want to smoke, but abstain, is very hard. But here, with all cruelty set aside, I was told: “If you want to smoke, then smoke. Just abstain on the day before Communion”. A day?! I couldn't abstain for a whole day! “More precisely, don't smoke in the morning before you go to church”, he said. “And before smoking, say, 'Lord, have mercy!' forty times”. I learned how to say that really fast. The time it took to get the match ready was just enough to say it forty times.

But, in my case, things went differently... Things happen differently with everyone. The Lord gave him much to learn through this example, but that was not the case with me. I wasn't expecting to have quick success with this task; I thought this would go on for a long time. I understood perfectly that I was not making any effort myself. This bothered me. Moreover, I did not even get enough time to acquire hate towards this passion. I was told that this is a bad thing, and I accepted that with faith—if it's bad, then, well, it's bad. Inside though I did not understand what was bad about it. I also perfectly understood that my prayer could in no wise be called attentive. I just wanted to smoke; there was no time for attentiveness.

And then suddenly, on one fine day, literally only a few months later, the passion receded from me, and it was as if I had never had it. I stopped smoking and do not smoke to this day. I didn't go through the torments that I was told about by those who quit smoking—how awful it is, how every single day you want to smoke. I don't want to say that it always happens this

way, but this was an edifying example. In this case the Lord dealt mercifully with me. Now the only thing left for me to do is to guard this with attentiveness in order not to be taken by *assaults* and from *conversation* with them enter into a state of *captivity* by the passion and end up back in the pit that the Lord had brought me out of.

[Archpriest George Neifach](#)
Translated by Feodor Nemets

[Sretensky Monastery website](#)

11/26/2019

ON SIMPLE MIRACLES IN FAMILY LIFE

Several Stories from Georgia

[Maria Saradzhishvili](#)

These stories have been recounted by readers of some Georgian newspapers and magazines. They are about miracles which are near us and about the simple truths we tend to forget all the time: the recipe for a happy family life is love, which seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil (1 Cor. 13:5), which means forgiving and caring for someone else above all.



A prophecy

I got married late. Two years flew by, but I couldn't conceive. Though I had a lot of treatments, the Lord did not send us the much-desired baby.

One night my husband and I were driving home. It was pouring down rain. By the lightning we spotted an old woman under a tree. My husband stopped, got out of the car with an umbrella, took the old woman and put her on the back seat. The woman smiled and said:

“I have been sitting there for such a long time but no one has bothered to stop. The hearts of people have hardened: they are unable to pity others, but they demand God's attention at the same time. As for you, you have grace and the Lord will reward you for your kindness.”

My husband interrupted her:

“If only you were right! In reality, we have not been found worthy even of simple human happiness...”

However, he didn't say that he worried because of our childlessness.

The old woman fell silent and didn't reply. But when she was getting out of the car she turned to us and said:

“Your child will be born in the summer of 2005.”

We were dumbfounded... It was the late fall of 1995.

We both continued our treatment for years. Then we decided to adopt a child. For some reason the old woman's words stuck in our memory and we believed them... However, as believers we feared that the prophecy might have come from the forces of evil.

In 2000, we adopted a girl, Mariam, who made our family very happy.

But a true miracle was in store for us. Our son George was born in July 2005. Then I was forty-three, and my husband was forty-eight.

*Anna Maisuradze
The Kviris Palitra newspaper*

The church wedding that was not blessed

We had attempted to have a [church wedding](#) on several occasions, but unsuccessfully. In our day my beloved and I had run away from home (our parents were against our union) and things got rather spontaneous. When I got pregnant, we decided to formalize our relationship and marry in church. My boyfriend was a Doubting Thomas and kept saying:

“You know, I am an atheist. I don't care about this needless ceremony! The main thing is the registry office.”

We had a heated argument because of this, since I, unlike him, hoped to receive God's blessing for our union through this rite.

When we approached the church just before the sacrament, my husband said:

“There is something wrong with my heart. I am feeling very unwell.”

I naturally got angry:

“You have chosen this day to make me nervous?! Go into the church and behave properly!”

“Okay, no problem!” he gave way, pulled himself together and joked, addressing the best man:

“I don’t believe! I hope it will all be over soon...”

The service of holy matrimony began. But when it was time to drink from the same chalice, suddenly my husband’s eyes rolled, he collapsed, and the sacrament was disrupted. With some difficulty we brought him round, but as soon as the priest gave him the chalice to drink from, my husband fainted again. The same happened three times. However earnestly I asked him to take himself in hand and hold on, it didn’t help. When he regained consciousness, he told us that an angel in white had appeared to him and said:

“You do not believe in God and take His name in vain. You will not be able to marry in church until you become a real believer.”

So we had to leave the church without a wedding.

It became clear that it was the will of God, and I had to put up with that. Now ten years have passed. I have noticed that my other half has changed and come to believe in God. Perhaps the long-awaited day will arrive soon and the Lord will bless our union.

Tiniko, twenty-nine
The Tbiliselebi magazine

A priest’s prayer

I would like to recount a miracle that occurred to me.

My boss gave me a copy of the icon of the Theotokos, “[She Who Is Quick to Hear](#)”, which helps pregnant women. I began to pray in front of it all the time and took it to the maternity home with me because the doctors had predicted a difficult labor. With great difficulty I managed to sneak the icon into the delivery room with me.

It was right after the end of the war of August 2008. A young widow whose husband had been killed in combat operations was in labor in the same room. Fr. Zaza (unfortunately, I don’t remember his surname), rector of the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God, came up to her. As it turned out later, he had been taking care of his spiritual daughter all the time, and that is why he was let into the delivery room as an exception. Seeing my icon, Fr. Zaza was surprised and said that it was a very rare copy. Next he blessed me and wondered:

“What are you going to name your baby?”

“Nikoloz,” I replied.

The priest put his cross on my abdomen three times and said, addressing the baby:

“Nikoloz, stop tormenting your mom! Come into this world as soon as possible!”

According to the doctors the baby would be born five or six hours later, but I gave birth to my son, Nikoloz Kvitsaridze, twenty minutes later, without any complications.

The Sarke magazine

The grandson we rejected has become our only provider

I am seventy-two. I have been faithful to my moral principles all my life and always demanded the same of those around me. I used to teach at a school and everybody knew me as an upright person.

I raised two children, but, unfortunately, they didn't take after my husband and I. But that is another subject. Now I am going to speak about a mistake of mine that I cannot forgive myself for.

I kept the traditions passed down to us from our parents. For that generation, infidelity was unthinkable. I tried to instill the same thing in my children. But, ironically, the things we try hardest to avoid befall us.

My son was unfaithful to his wife and had an affair with another woman despite the fact that he already had two children. When I learned about his affair, it was too late. And, though I was not quite satisfied with my daughter-in-law and didn't think she was the right match for my son, I wholeheartedly took her side and did my best to put an end to this relationship.

“I will turn you out of the house!” I would threaten my son.

And I would cheer up my daughter-in-law at the same time:

“No one will destroy your family!”

Meanwhile, I dug into that woman's past and discovered a secret my son didn't know about. Before that he used to insist: “She is a decent woman! Do not dare say bad things about her!” Then I confronted him with a fact, revealing the details of her past to him.

It was that disclosure that caused the “desired” conflict between my son and that woman. At last he realized that his own family was the most important thing to him in the world and didn’t cheat on his wife anymore.

Before we could heave a sigh of relief, the story started anew. Three months later I learned that this rascal of a woman was expecting. It was crystal clear who the father of the child was. I burst into her home and demanded that she have an [abortion](#). She answered that the fetus was large enough and the doctors would not take risks, so I must reconcile myself to that fact.

You can’t imagine how much I suffered and worried, as if the baby were going to die and not be born. Every day I would repeat to my son that he must not recognize that woman’s child as his son because he already had legitimate children and that was enough.

The boy was born. Of course, I didn’t go to see him, neither did I allow my son to do so; I didn’t regard this child as my grandson.

That woman made an attempt to ensure that we give our surname to her child, but we refused pointblank. She made every effort to ensure contact between her son and his father, but I stood in her way like the Wall of China.

One day she brought the child to me and said:

“Look, he is a carbon copy of your son!”

And indeed it was so. But I turned my face away from the boy and said:

“What if my son has other children with other women? We are not going to recognize them all! He has two legitimate ones, and that is sufficient.”

And she responded:

“The day will come when you will regret saying this.”

I burst out laughing cynically, and we parted. I didn’t see them again for many years. This mother and her son didn’t appear in our life for some time, we only heard some rumors about them sometimes. My son cut off contact with them as well. He became bogged down with his own problems. Besides, his wife got the upper hand, so he does everything according to her orders to this day.

My daughter-in-law brought up her daughters in hatred for me, so they don’t remember anything good I have ever done for them, though I have done a lot and even saved their family.

My granddaughters only call my daughter-in-law’s mother “granny”, they speak to me disrespectfully, and shout at me as if I were a child. We live apart. Sometimes they don’t call

or come to see us, their grandparents, for a whole year. My son calls only because he feels obliged to and keeps saying that he is busy.

My daughter married abroad and she has no children.

To my great shame, now the only provider for me and my husband is the very boy who we once refused to recognize as our grandson. He bought a house next door. He came to us himself and said that he bears us no grudge. His mother is not on speaking terms with us, but at least she doesn't forbid him to communicate with us.

He is a real man—the kind of man I wanted to see in my son. Whenever we need anything, he (as though instinctively) comes to us immediately, bringing us food, medicines, etc.

My daughter-in-law is displeased that we are on close terms with him. But I don't care. I am trying to make up for the wrong I did him and his mother as I feel pangs of conscience.

Your faithful reader
The Sarke magazine. 26.04.2017

My happiness as other people's happiness

I married at sixteen. I loved my husband dearly. His parents accepted me as one of their kin, and I respected them greatly too. We had two children together. But happy years flew by quickly. On exactly our eleventh wedding anniversary my husband was murdered on a train. The circumstances of his murder still remain a mystery to us—we have had to accept it.

Grief-stricken, my husband's parents did their best to protect me from any problems and helped me raise my children. I was devastated by my husband's death and could not imagine how to go on living. My parents-in-law could see my suffering. Their personal tragedy was aggravated by the fact that they had no one in the whole world apart from me and their grandchildren. A year later I gathered myself up and came to work. I was often told: "You still can remarry. You are rather young." I had suitors too, but I rejected everybody.

Soon I was intrigued by one thing. My parents-in-law, who were homebodies, began to go and visit someone very frequently. Of course, I didn't ask them about anything. One day a handsome young man whom I had never seen before came to our place. My husband's parents welcomed him very cordially. In a nutshell, my in-laws (who could not imagine their life without me and didn't want me to leave them) themselves found a future husband for me!

They said:

“You are our daughter, and this young man will be like a son to us. So our life will be in your hands.”

First I tried to protest, but my in-laws talked me into marrying him. And their “son-in-law” proved to justify their choice completely. He brought warmth and happiness to our family.

About ten years have passed. Our relations have become even more beautiful. And we have two children together. Our parents-in-law are near us all the time and they always call my husband “our son”. We repay their love with love. After all, they put my happiness above their own grief. I believe that God sent them to me so that I could feel happy.

*Meri B.
The Sarke magazine*

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