

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

# Studies in the Faith

## Eschatology or Life After Death



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# ESCHATOLOGY OR LIFE AFTER DEATH

*But, being God before all ages, He appeared on earth and lived with mankind. Becoming incarnated from a holy Virgin, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, conforming to the body of our lowliness, that He might change us in the likeness of the image of His glory.*

(From the Holy Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great)

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

St. Luke 16:19-31

St. Matthew 25:1-12

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT ESCHATOLOGY OR LIFE AFTER DEATH

We as Christians, as human beings for that matter, do everything we can to suppress the grim reality of death. We forget that Christ defeated death. Jesus Himself states that he “...*goes to prepare a room for us in His Father’s Kingdom...*”

What does the Orthodox Church believe happens when a person dies?

## THE INTERMEDIATE JUDGMENT

The Orthodox Church believes that immediately after death a person is Judged. Even though the body sleeps, the soul does not sleep after death. It is fully conscious, experiencing a foretaste of it’s reward or punishment. However we must wait for Christ’s second coming before we can receive the fullness of our reward.

Example of an elected official taking the oath of office after election.

It is important to remember that there is no repentance after we have passed away. We cannot ask forgiveness for our sins, our souls cannot undergo further spiritual growth once we have fallen asleep in the Lord. The Orthodox Church does not believe in the Catholic dogma of purgatory since this dogma is unscriptural (Luke 16:19-31). The sins we have not repented for while alive remain with us until Christ’s second coming.

## HERETICAL BELIEFS CONCERNING THE INTERMEDIATE JUDGMENT

1. The belief that the partial judgment does not take place and that the just and sinful souls are in a state of tranquility and sleep is not an Orthodox Christian Teaching since this teaching goes against scripture (Luke 16:19-31).
2. The time between death and the final judgment is a continuation of life on earth and that there is no difference between the present life and the period leading to the final judgment.

## MEMORIAL SERVICES

Besides the prayers which are raised up to God during the funeral services on behalf of the dead, the Orthodox Church has also ordained that Memorial Services be offered on certain days.

The origin of the memorial service is found in Scripture. From the Old Testament we are informed that the Israelites prayed to God to forgive the sins of their fathers who had died (Nehemiah 9:2). When on the garments of dead soldiers they found pagan amulets, considered a great sin for a pious Israelite, the people prayed to God for their souls that He may forgive them (II Maccabees 12:40-42). From the New Testament we learn that St. Paul prays that our Lord Jesus Christ may grant that the faithful Onesiphoros, who was already dead, “find mercy from the Lord,” and the Father on the day of the second coming (II Timothy 1:18). This is why we find Memorials already in place from the first centuries of the Church’s life. And this is so for we are all, both living and dead, the “body of Christ and individually members of it.” (I Corinthians 12:27).

The memorial which occurs on the third day symbolizes what?

The memorial which occurs on the ninth day after a persons death symbolizes what?

The memorial which occurs on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after a person’s death symbolizes what?

The memorial services which are celebrated at three, six and nine months symbolize what?

## SATURDAY OF THE SOULS AND KOLIVA

The Orthodox Church has ordained common Memorials be celebrated twice a year—on the Saturday before Meatfare Sunday and on the Saturday before the feast of Pentecost.

On the Memorial celebrated before Meatfare Sunday, the Church prays for all those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. This practice was established by the early Church because certain believers suffered death prematurely in “strange lands far away from their relatives, in the sea, on the mountains; or because others died of a contagious disease or of hunger; or they fell on the battle field, or were burnt in fire, or died from the cold or storms. Others, again, may not have had the benefit of the designated memorials of the Church.” Consequently, with this common Memorial the opportunity is af-

forded to us to pray for all of those Orthodox Christians who have fallen asleep and have not had the benefit of a funeral service.

On the Memorial service celebrated before the feast of Pentecost, the Church commemorated “all those who have piously fallen asleep from the beginning of the age in the hope of the resurrection unto life eternal.” Thus on this day, we do not pray only from Christians, for from Adam to Christ there were no Christians. We pray for all those who have died since Adam until today and who worshipped God with a pure life. The Church prays from their souls that they provide “a good account at the time of judgment” and that they may be found “as the right hand of God with joy, in the portion of the righteous and the saints, with a bright inheritance”, and, thus, become worthy of “the heavenly kingdom.”

At the sacred Memorial services, Koliva (boiled wheat) is offered, a practice which can be traced to the middle of the fourth century. Bread and wine with olives or cheese or rice were offered in Memorials of earlier times. These gifts went to feed the poor and less fortunate. As a continuation of that ancient custom what takes place today are the luncheons and the coffees offered by the relatives of the deceased to the entire community.

The Koliva which finally prevailed over the other gifts is very symbolic in nature. The boiled wheat which makes up the Koliva symbolizes the resurrection from the dead of our bodies. The Koliva reminds us that man, too, is a seed that is at death buried in the earth as is the seed of wheat. This seed will be resurrected again by the power of God. For this reason, as St. Symeon of Thessaloniki observes, in the Koliva we add various other seeds (raisins, walnuts, almonds, sesame, etc.). But the basic element is always wheat because the Savior Himself likened His all holy Body and His resurrection to wheat, saying “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit (John 12:24).

In addition to all the above, our beloved Church has ordained that Saturday be a day of commemoration of the holy Martyrs and of all the deceased.

## THE LAST DAYS PRIOR TO CHRIST’S SECOND COMING

Scripture mentions six events that will occur before the second coming of our Lord and Savior. They are as follows:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

The six signs that will precede the Second coming are sufficiently vague as to keep the exact time of his coming a mystery so that we may constantly be on watch.

## CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

At Christ's second coming all will be judged in Jesus Christ! Scripture tells us the following will occur at Christ's second coming:

(Look up the specific scripture verse and write in your own words what will happen when Christ comes again)

1. (Acts 1:6-11 & Matthew 24:31-31 & 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

2. (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18)

3. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10)

4. (Philippians 3:20-21)

When Christ comes again the General Judgment will occur. The purpose of His first coming was to prepare us for His second coming. Our Lord and Savior will be our judge on the last day. He will not condemn those who have sinned, but rather those who have sinned without repenting.

## HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST'S COMING

There have been those in the history of Christianity who have believed in the so-called millennium. This belief teaches that when Christ returns He will reign on earth with His disciples for one thousand years. This belief is based on a literalistic (erroneous) interpretation of St. John's revelation, Chapter

20, and was espoused by heretics in the early Church. As a result this heresy was condemned by the second ecumenical council in the year 381. It is due to this heresy that the Church fathers put the following statement in the creed, "And He shall come again in Glory to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end" to emphasize that God will come again to judge all and upon His coming there will not be two kingdoms of Christ (one on earth and one in Heaven as the Chialists believe) but one everlasting kingdom of God in heaven for an eternity.

## HEAVEN

Orthodox Theology teaches that the bliss of heaven consists (1) in deliverance from suffering, pain, grief, corruption, etc., (2) the enjoyment of the vision of God and (3) the reunion of all other righteous souls.

The believer who walks with Jesus on the road of life already has eternal life. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" said St. John in his Gospel 6:54. Not "will have" but "has." Heaven therefore, is a continuation of our communion with Jesus that begins on earth.

## HELL

Hell is a reality. If anyone is in hell, it is not because God has imprisoned him there, but because that is where he himself has chosen to be. In essence, it is not God who will condemn us, but we ourselves by our own actions!

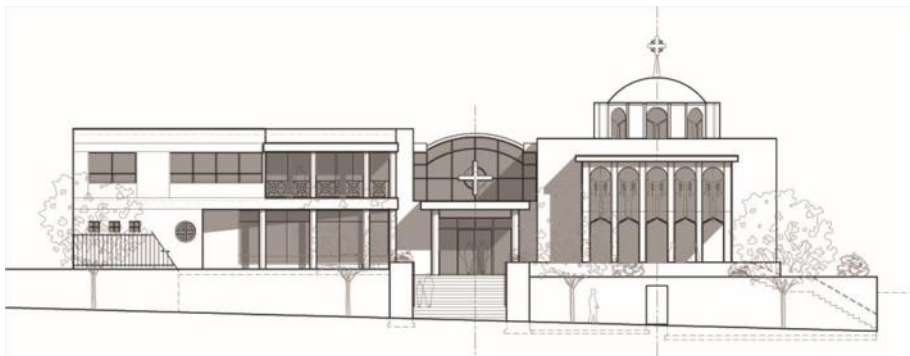
## IN CONCLUSION

Eschatology forces us to ask ourselves some very basic questions:

- What is the direction of my life right now?
- If I keep following this way, where will I end up?
- Am I headed toward God or away from Him?
- Is my relationship to my Savior a living one or one of lip service only?
  - If I should die right now, where would I find myself?

## SESSION NOTES





*"Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God"*