There are some even among Christians, to whom the gifts of the Holy Ghost seem so strange, that although they dare not entirely reject them, they nevertheless refer them to other persons and to other times, and without acknowledging the necessity of being “born again,” content themselves either with a vain hope in the merits of the Mediator, or even with their own righteousness. Let us not be deceived by the tempting aspect which worldly honesty generally bears. To be no enemy to faith, to do no crying injustice, to make an occasional display of charity, to avoid pernicious excesses, in short, to fulfil merely the most indispensable and outward duties of a man and of a member of society, is but to whiten one’s sepulchre, which nevertheless remains “within full of dead men’s bones”; “it is to pluck the “leaves of the tree of life”, given for the “healing of the nations”, but not to “eat its fruit”, which should feed the Christian; it is to have “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees”, which does not lead into the Kingdom of God. But to penetrate into the recesses of one’s own heart, from which “proceed evil thoughts” and there to establish purity and holiness, “to keep the whole law “and not to “offend in one point” in order not to be “guilty of all”; who is the man, that left to his own understanding and powers, will boast of being able to do this? It is God alone Who “creates in man a clean heart, and renews a right spirit within him.”

We must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, although the incorruptible seed of this heavenly birth was brought down unto earth by the death of the God-Man Jesus, still we cannot leave all the rest to the power of His merits, however unlimited they be. How is this? Did God then deliver up His Son as a sacrifice not only to His own justice, but also to our ingratitude? Was the reality of the Sacrifice of the Cross made known to us in order that we might remain the more thoughtless and inactive? To think thus is not to exalt the merits of Christ, but rather to lower them, and to rest on them with the same pernicious thoughtlessness as once the Jews “rested on the law.” If we have been baptized in Christ, then let us, in accordance with that confession, manifest in ourselves the fruit of baptism, not by water only, but by the Spirit, for Christ “baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

Finally, when the Divine gift of the Spirit appears to us to be but seldom manifested, let us not on that account infer that it does not exist for all. It is for us all as long as all are for it. If its presence is no longer perceived, then it is either because though we have eyes yet we do not see; or is it indeed because the question, “when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” is near its solution, and the world itself is come to its last gasp? The universe knows what became of it when God said in His wrath, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he also is flesh.” Then was it that not only lawless mankind, but all creatures subject not of themselves to vanity were destroyed by the revenging flood. One more such threat,— and there comes the fiery deluge of the Last Judgment. But as long, Christians, as God preserves our existence, and the welfare of
His Church, so long need we not doubt that the Spirit of God abideth in it. Even as at the time of the creation of the world, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” so is it moving even now, during the continued restoration of man, upon the deep of our disordered being, and by its quickening power ensures his regeneration by grace. Let us yield ourselves unto His Almighty will; let us turn our thoughts and desires from the flesh and the world unto Him; let us, out of the depth of our fallen nature cry unto the Holy One, that He should come unto us, and by the grace acquired through the mediation of the Redeemer, should cleanse, enlighten, regenerate, sanctify, and save our souls. Amen.


HOLY GLORIOUS PROPHET ELIJAH

Troparion — Tone 4

An angel in the flesh and the cornerstone of the prophets, / the second forerunner of the coming of Christ, / Glorious Elijah sent grace from on high to Elisha, / to dispel diseases and to cleanse lepers. / Therefore, he pours forth healings on those who honor him.

Kontakion — Tone 2

Prophet Elijah of great renown, / seer of the mighty mighty works of God, / by your command you held back the rain! / Pray for us to the only Lover of mankind!

July 20th, 2016