

The Times Leader

Sunday of Orthodoxy celebrates ancient councils

Editor's note: This is part of an occasional series of articles from Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church in Barton regarding the Lenten season.

By KIMBERLY HURLEY

Special to The Times Leader

Today is the first Sunday of Great Lent. On this day Eastern Orthodox Churches around the world commemorate the Seventh and last Ecumenical Council of the Church. It was at the Ecumenical Councils, which occurred between 325 and 727 A.D., that the great doctrines of Christianity were formally confirmed. Representatives from the entire Church, throughout the known world, came together in agreement and conciliarity to preserve these truths; many of those in attendance at these councils bore in their bodies the scars of grievous persecutions, and written on their hearts, was the very faith for which so many had sacrificed life and limb.

Why are these ancient councils important to us today? Because this is our shared Christian heritage, and as Paul admonished, we are to hold fast and preserve the faith, (2 Thessalonians 2:15) as it was delivered to us by Christ and the Apostles. Many and diverse are local Christian traditions around the world, but the major doctrines confirmed in these ancient councils should be shared and valued by us all. Major doctrines, such as the Incarnation of Christ, that God the Word took on human flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), must continue to be guarded by modern day Christians. Saint Vincent of Lerins, who died in A.D. 445, explained in a sermon that doctrinal development should be like the development of human beings. Doctrine may

grow and expand upon itself; the meaning may be found to be deeper, the understanding expanded, but not changed. As also a human baby changes, as it grows into an adult, and eventually, an elderly person, he or she remains the same person from the beginning. (Synaxarion of the Lenton Triodian and Pentecotarian, 2001)

It is important then, that we always remember the basic and first tenants of our faith. If our faith does not agree with the original tenants, for example if it denies the Incarnation, then it has become something other than true Christianity, and is therefore unable to impart to us salvation. The word “*orthodoxy*” itself, can apply to any number of things in our English language, and usually refers to conventional accepted norms. Christian Orthodoxy, refers then, to the accepted and correct doctrines of Christianity: “*Ortho*” – right, “*Doxa*” – doctrine, doxology.

On this Sunday of Orthodoxy we remember, especially, the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and at the end of Vespers this evening, Orthodox churches around the world, will be declaring together the Proclamation of that council: “*As the Prophets beheld, as the Apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers have dogmatized, as the Universe has agreed, as grace has shown forth, as Truth has revealed, as Falsehood has been dissolved, as Wisdom has presented, as Christ awarded ... This is the Faith of the Apostles! This is the Faith of the Fathers! This is the Faith of the Orthodox! This is the Faith which has established the Universe!*”

This year, may we all learn more about our shared Christian history. Everyone is welcome to join us for Vespers today at 4 p.m. at The Greek Orthodox Church of the Lifegiving Fountain in Martins Ferry. Come and see how the Ancient Church of Christ prayed at the coming of evening, and proclaim with us the “*Faith that established the Universe!*”

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