

ST ELIZABETH ORTHODOX CHURCH

St Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church
321 W McKnight Drive
Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37129

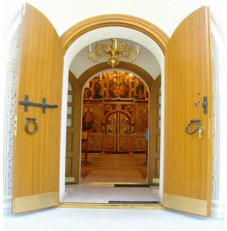
phone: 615.785.5285
e-mail: info@stelizabethtn.org
web: www.stelizabethtn.org

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
of North America



Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Welcome to St Elizabeth Orthodox Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.



ST ELIZABETH'S AT A GLANCE:

- ✦ Founded in 2004
- ✦ Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
- ✦ First Orthodox church in Rutherford Cty
- ✦ Dozens of ministries enabling members to support each other and the wider community
- ✦ St Elizabeth's strives to "continue in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

ABOUT US

We began as an informal home fellowship. The founders of St Elizabeth's had been members of two regional Orthodox churches - Holy Trinity, in Nashville, and St Ignatius, in Franklin - but also had a desire to establish this ancient Christian presence in Rutherford County. The new community was granted mission status in December 2004 by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated, still in a home, in January 2005 with five families.

Leasing property on West McKnight Drive, in Murfreesboro, began in February 2005; renovations started around the first of March. An equal measure of sweat and love

produced an extraordinary worship and fellowship space - the walls, icon screen, painting, artwork, kitchen, and much more, were completed entirely by members of the new mission. After the long but beloved labor, the first Divine Liturgy in the new church was celebrated on March 20, 2005.

St Elizabeth the New Martyr

Our mission is named in honor of Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England and aunt of Tsar Nicholas II by marriage. She had been Protestant, but converted to the Orthodox Christian faith in 1894 while in Russia, ten years after marrying Grand Duke Sergei, uncle of Tsar Nicholas II. Her conversion was neither forced nor required by marriage, but a voluntary response to the truth and beauty she encountered in the faith of her adopted homeland - the same truth and beauty that has inspired the founders and members of our parish, and, we pray, will inspire Rutherford County for generations to come.

WHAT IS THE ORTHODOX CHURCH?

The Orthodox Church is the oldest Church in Christendom, yet new to many people in North America.

A Brief History

The Orthodox Christian Church - also known, because of its geographic roots, as the Eastern Orthodox Church - understands itself to be the living continuity of the faith and life established by Jesus Christ, given to His apostles, described in the Bible, practiced by the early Church, defended with the blood of martyrs, and passed on by those Christians associated with the ancient centers and earliest centuries of Christian history.

Many are surprised to learn that for the first thousand years of Christian history, there

existed one Church - though not without their struggles, Christians held a common faith, a common life, and a common practice.

Then, a disastrous split of the Latin West (Catholicism) from the Orthodox East occurred in the eleventh century, with a further schism between Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century, and an additional splintering of Protestantism into the thousands of denominations of today.

Many Catholics and Protestants - in search of the fullness of that common faith, life, and practice they encounter in Holy Scripture - are returning to their Orthodox Christian roots.

ORTHODOXY AT A GLANCE:

- *Orthodoxy* means "right glory" or "right praise" and was used in the ancient Church to distinguish genuine Christian faith from heresy.
- The Orthodox Church is the oldest Christian body in the world, with 230 million members.
- In the 20th century alone, 40 million Orthodox Christians died for their faith, primarily under Communism. She is often called "the Church of the Martyrs."
- Orthodoxy offers theological stability, liturgical beauty, spiritual vibrancy, and a life of charitable service.

HOLY SCRIPTURE COMES TO LIFE

The sacred writings that comprise the Bible emerged from the sacred community of ancient Israel and the early Church - a people dedicated to a whole way of life and worship. Because of Orthodoxy's organic and unbroken link to this community - through the ages and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - one may notice many Scriptural texts "coming to life" during a visit to an Orthodox church. For example:

- The **Altar**, to provide for the offering of the Eucharist (Ex 20:24-26; Psalm 43:3-4; Heb 13:10; Rev 8:3)
- **Candles**, to remember that Christ is the "Light of the world" (Psalm 18:28; John 8:12, Eph 5:14)
- **Holy Communion**, to participate in the Body and Blood of Christ (Luke 22:19-20; John 6:51-58; I Cor 10:14; 11:17-29; Rev 19:9)
- **Icons**, to proclaim the Incarnation of the Word of God "in the flesh" as Jesus Christ and to reveal the potential of holiness for each human being (Gen 1:27; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:3; II Peter 1:4)
- **Incense**, to facilitate prayer (Ex 40:26-27; Psalm 141:2; Eph 5:2; Rev 5:8)
- **Liturgy**, to follow Christ our High Priest and to intercede for the world (Isaiah 6:1-7; Acts 2:42; Heb 7:17; I Tim 2:5; Heb 8:1-2)

The riches of Orthodox Christian worship are, as the book of Hebrews explains, not substitutes for, but "copies of the true" worship in heaven (Hebrews 9:24; Isaiah 6:1-8; Daniel 7; Revelation 4-5). We strive to come to God not as we, or popular opinion, assume Him to be, but as He genuinely is.

A life given to such prayer and humility leads, gradually, toward a "sacramental vision" of the whole of life itself: seeing all things in Christ and Christ in all things. The worship we offer to God on Sunday morning (and also throughout the week) is a big part of acquiring that vision, as are the daily repentance and sustained joy to which we are called.

The Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church - our main worship service on Sunday mornings - contains over 200 direct quotations of Holy Scripture, so when the faithful assembly, the bible becomes a living book of prayer. As the early Christians said, "how we believe is how we pray, and how we pray is how we believe."

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND THE WHOLE PERSON

For Orthodox Christians, worshipping the true and living God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - is an *experience*, engaging both the mind and the body with all its senses. This is an offering of the whole person to God, as described by the apostle Paul: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23). A few examples:

The Sense of Sight: Icons



What about all these icons? Icons - the "portraits" of saints that adorn an Orthodox church - have been part of Christian life since the early centuries of the Church. They are not the "graven images" of the Old Testament, which attempted to portray God in His transcendent divinity - a divinity that cannot be likened to any created thing. And certainly, icons are venerated and not worshipped, since worship is for God alone. Instead, icons reveal the transformation that is possible for the believer in Christ. Icons are "theology in color." How?

- "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).
- "He is the image (*ikonos* in Greek, or *icon*) of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

First, icons witness to the truth of the Incarnation. Because the Son of God really and truly became flesh and blood, there is a material dimension to Christian faith: "That which we have heard, which we have seen

with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" is the Son of God (I John 1:1). God used the physical world to reach for us, so we may use the physical world to reach for Him.

Second, icons of holy men and women through the ages call to mind that "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) that surrounds us. In their imitation of Christ, the saints are those "christified" by grace. Anointed by the Holy Spirit and having become temples of God, they kept the true faith in soul and body. Similarly, those persons who keep the faith "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) become "living icons" themselves. Icons, therefore, tell us about Christ and give us a glimpse of what is possible for our lives.

The Sense of Hearing: Music



A visitor to an Orthodox church will notice much music, song, and hymnography. Through her two-thousand year history, Orthodoxy has accumulated an enormous volume of hymns and musical settings to "praise God in His sanctuary" (Psalm 150:1).

Faith shares with music a deep place in the human person. When sung or chanted, a biblical passage or poetic hymn can penetrate the heart in ways that simple spoken text cannot. Sacred words offered in prayerful melody make us feel alive. "He who sings," wrote the early Church figure Tertullian, "prays twice."

The Sense of Smell: Incense



Just as the wise men did at His birth, Orthodox Christians offer incense to the King of Kings (Matthew 2:11).

Why did Old Testament Jews and New Testament Christians use incense? *To identify something as holy*, as when Aaron, the priest and brother of Moses, offered incense every morning and evening in the holy altar; and *as a visual expression of prayer*, as when the Apostle John, in his apocalyptic vision, observed the incense carrying the prayers of the saints upward toward God, prayers that were sweet to God because of the holy life from which they were offered. As we sing at every Vespers - an evening prayer service - just as the priest begins to swing the censer: "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee, as the incense" (Psalm 141:2).

The Sense of Touch: Veneration



Human beings need connection and relationship. Spiritual realities are easier to grasp and assimilate when made accessible, just as the thought of a friend or loved one becomes more real when he or she is immediately before us. To encourage these

connections and relationships, Orthodox Christians venerate - to demonstrate honor and respect - holy things: we make the sign of the cross over our bodies and kiss holy objects such as icons or the relics of the saint. But we also venerate each other, as when we exchange the Kiss of Peace during the Divine Liturgy.

From the bones of Elisha (when the body of a man being buried next to that prophet came into contact with his bones, the man came alive again and stood on his feet - II Kings 13:20-21) to the handkerchiefs of St Paul (which, after they had touched St Paul's body, were then taken away to heal the sick and diseased - Acts 19:12), the grace of God can pass through grace-filled persons to touch the simple everyday objects of His creation.

The Sense of Taste: Holy Communion



Which is more intimate and experiential - to read a recipe for chocolate chip cookies, or to actually bite into one? Similarly, one may read of Christ's great teaching on Himself as the "bread of life" in John 6, but the more intimate and experiential encounter with this "bread of life" is in partaking of the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion. The Eucharist does not replace the Bible, since both are crucial. Rather, it is the visceral way that Christ the Savior chose for sharing His very Self with His people.

WOULD WE BE MISSED?

The parish of St Elizabeth strives to make positive contributions to our community. In our divine services, we pray for "this city and every city and countryside, and the faithful who dwell therein." We hope to intercede before God for all persons, rendering the needs of others as important as our own. "My brother is my life," wrote the twentieth century saint Silouan of Mt Athos.

Our prayer for our city and surroundings also takes tangible expression. From our Ministry Teams and our outreach to the poor, to our blessing of the local river waters at Theophany, we bless, help transform, and feel responsible for where we live. It is a love that we hope emanates from the local parish, like warmth from the sun. A constant question for a local congregation should be, "If our church were to close, would we be missed?"

MINISTRY TEAMS

Each member of the Body of Christ at St Elizabeth's is encouraged to exercise the gifts and talents entrusted by God to him or her. Our Ministry Teams exist to provide opportunities for that service.

MINISTRY TEAMS,

as opportunities to serve, at a glance:

- Altar Servers
- Caregivers
- Children's Events
- Church Cleaning
- Encouragement
- Finance
- Greeters and Offering
- Hospitality
- Liturgical Arts
- Mercy Meals
- Missions and Evangelism
- Music
- Property Maintenance
- Prospora
- Sunday School
- Temple Beautification

FAMILIES TOGETHER

At St Elizabeth's, families worship together. We have Sunday School classes and children's programs, and various opportunities for individual and group activities, but everyone is invited to "gather together with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2:46) for worship.

St Elizabeth's is pleased to be the church home for families of different situations and sizes and stations in life. Orthodox worship of God is deeply experiential, so children often absorb the content of Christian faith and teaching in ways easily accessible to them.

ANYTHING FOR CHILDREN?

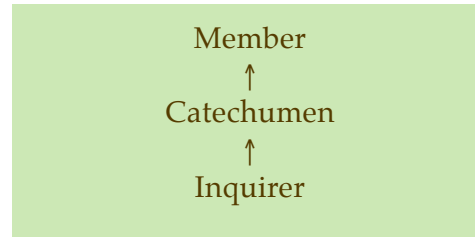
From September through May, we offer a Sunday School Program on Sunday mornings for ages 3 and up, with dedicated teachers. Also, we offer the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* – an approach to the spiritual formation of children rooted in the bible and in the ancient liturgy. Children meet in an *atrium*, a room prepared just for them which contains simple yet beautiful materials they use to help them absorb the most essential proclamations of the Christian faith. Additionally, we provide a steady stream of events and activities through the year to keep our children involved.

ABOUT COMMUNION

For Orthodox Christians, Holy Communion - and all the Sacraments of the Church - is not merely a bridge toward unity, but an expression of a unity already achieved. We respect the freedom of all persons to believe as they choose, while offering Holy Communion only to members of the common faith, life, and practice of the Orthodox Church. As an expression of hospitality, all persons are invited to partake of the blessed bread offered also at the time of Holy Communion.

BECOMING ORTHODOX

Early in Christian history, a structured approach existed to help persons prepare to join the spiritual family of the Church. This approach continues in the Orthodox Church today. Generally, the three stages in this process are: *Inquirer*, *Catechumen*, *Member*.



Inquirer

An inquirer is a seeker - one who is simply inquiring into the Orthodox Church and its life, faith, practice, teachings, and history. The inquirer stage may be compared to the dating stage before a serious relationship: in addition to inquiring into Orthodoxy, one is free to "date around" - to attend any churches, partake of any traditions, seek for spiritual fulfillment anywhere. An inquirer is free to attend all Orthodox church services and to participate in parish events and educational classes. The length of the Inquirer stage depends on the prayerful discernment of both the individual and the priest, and the directives of the Archdiocese to which the parish of St Elizabeth belongs - the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

Catechumen

After prayer, reflection, reading, discussion, and attending Orthodox church services and classes, the inquirer desires to become a full member of the Orthodox Church. Here, one seeks the blessing of the priest to enter the more formalized process of the catechumenate, and a deeper commitment is made to living a fuller Christian life through daily prayer, moderate fasting, acts of service, and faithful church attendance. As in moving from dating to the engagement stage in a relationship, moving from the inquirer to the catechumen stage in joining the Church involves humbly and willingly forsaking all other traditions, religions, and non-Orthodox ways of life. As with the Inquirer stage, the length of the catechumenate depends on the prayerful discernment of both the individual and the priest, and the directives of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Member

The custom of the Orthodox Church has been to receive catechumens into full membership through the sacrament of Baptism (triple immersion, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). Under the discretion of the Archbishop, however, some catechumens are received through the sacrament of Chrismation (the fulfillment or completion of a previous Christian baptism by anointing with special oil). Now a full member of a local congregation of the holy Body of Christ, one is free and encouraged to partake of the full sacramental life of the Orthodox Church for salvation and union with God.

