

## THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

The first miracle performed by Christ was that of changing water into wine at the marriage in Cana. St. Paul praised virginity highly and St. John Climacus called the monastic life a '*light for all men*', but the union of man and wife in the mystery of marriage is also blessed and sanctified by the Orthodox Church.

As Orthodox Christians we should all praise virginity and the monastic life, but we should never speak against marriage, for God Himself has joined a man and his wife together. Marriage is a great mystery as St. Paul tells us:

*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

Those who are joined together by the Church in this mystery are given the strength to help and support each other in keeping Christ's commandments. St. Nikolai Velimirovich echoes the words of the Apostle Paul: '*A pure and honourable marriage, in the fear of God, is indeed a vessel of the Holy Spirit.*'<sup>28</sup>

So we can see that marriage has a spiritual or mystical purpose — for husband and wife to help each other into the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, the monastic life and married life are identical in what they are trying to achieve. Both monastics and married people have to follow the commandments of Christ and both have to try and purify their souls within the Orthodox Church.

Marriage also has a practical purpose, to preserve our purity and to produce children. However, the Orthodox Church considers the first reason much more important. In the Old Testament not having children was regarded as a curse, but as St. John Chrysostom explains '*because we have been raised from death to life in Christ there is no need for us to leave children behind us when we die.*'<sup>29</sup> Indeed, there are many blessed Orthodox couples that are unable to have children.

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<sup>28</sup> *Prologue from Ochrid Vol.2.*, (Lazarica Press: Birmingham, 1986) p.233

<sup>29</sup> C.P. Roth, D.Anderson (trans.), *St. John Chrysostom On Marriage And Family Life* (New York: SVS Press, 1986) p.85