

Kindle Thy Lamp

Introduction

The Department of Stewardship Ministry is pleased to offer this year's Stewardship packet entitled, "Kindle Thy Lamp". Inspiration for this packet comes from our ancestors, the early Christians, who gave oil as their offering to the Church, to keep the lamps burning. Some of our parishes report that they celebrate "Stewardship Sunday" by pouring oil into the oil lamps in Church as a prayer is read and offerings are given.

Following are the contents for your use:

5 Bulletin Inserts - For your ease in reproducing, these inserts are printed one per page, and are designed to be photocopied and inserted into parish bulletins. Bulletins are numbered in the following sequence:

- 1) The Oil That Bonds Us
- 2) The Oil of Obedience
- 3) The Oil of Brotherhood
- 4) Multiplying the Oil
- 5) The Oil of Salvation

3 Sample Letters - These are written for your use during your annual pledge campaign.

- 1) Sample Stewardship Appeal Letter - The initial letter to be sent to parishioners along with a pledge card.
- 2) Sample Stewardship Follow-U12 Letter - A letter designed to be sent to parishioners who have not responded to the first letter.
- 3) Stewardship Thank-You Letter - A letter acknowledging pledges and offerings from parishioners.

Stewardship Pledge Card - This pledge card is to be included with Stewardship Appeal Letters. It is perforated for parishioners to retain a copy for their records.

Artwork - Clip-art of our Stewardship Logo is enclosed for you to use on letterhead.

It is our hope that this packet is useful for our parishes. We welcome your suggestions for future materials.

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*"You anoint my head with oil,
MY CUP runneth over " Psalm 23:5*

Oil is a property associated with harmony, healing, and the divine. To be anointed with oil strengthens and reminds us of our bond with God. In the service of Holy Unction a prayer before anointing reads, "For you have not created man for destruction but for the keeping of the commandments and the inheritance of eternal life." (Holy Week Service Book, page 157.)

just as being anointed with oil bonds us with God, it is stewardship ... our deeds here on earth, that bond us to each other and distinguish us as people of God. We were anointed with oil and blessed with the Holy Spirit at Baptism. What we do once we have received this oil is stewardship.

Historically in our Church oil has been given as an offering. People brought oil to the Church so that the oil lamps would be kept burning. In small villages in Greece today olive growers still bring the first fruits of their crops -- an offering of olive oil to the local Church or Monastery. This offering of oil to keep the lamps burning is symbolic. In our families, our Churches and our Archdiocese, the acts of charity we perform for the benefit of our Holy Orthodox Church will serve to keep the oil lamps burning.

We have been anointed and our cup overflows. The Lord has given us everything in our lives. What can we give back to Him? This is the oil that bonds us to each other and to God.

The Oil of Obedience

"Rise and anoint Him; he is the one." (1 Samuel 16:12)

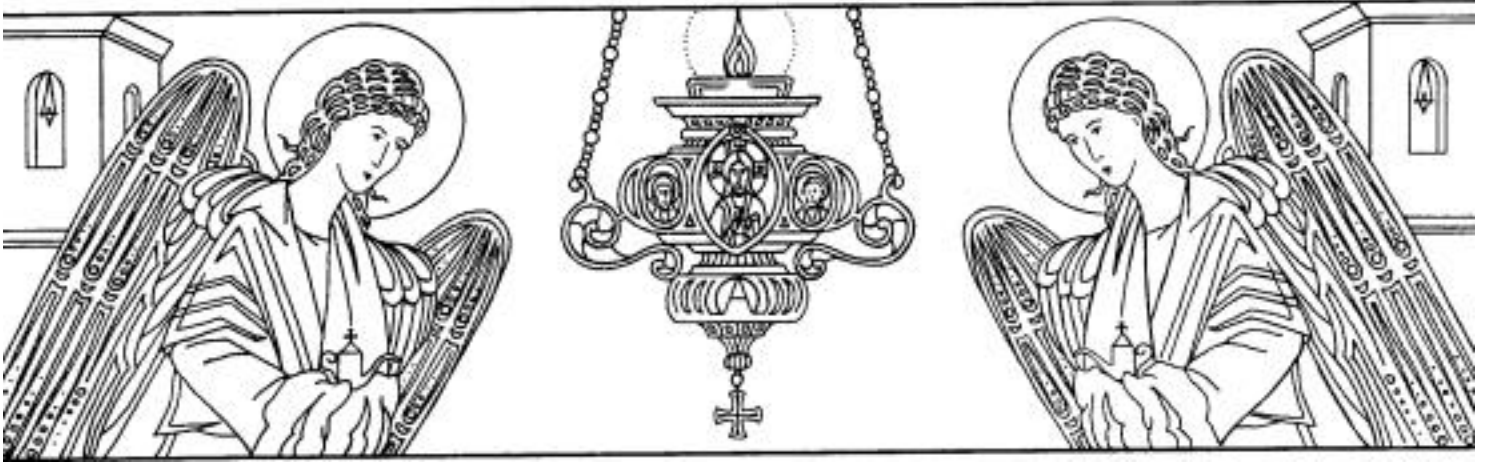
To be anointed with oil in Old Testament times was to be greatly blessed. In the early life of Israel, Saul was chosen to be the King and was anointed with oil by Samuel. However, throughout his Kingship, Saul troubled the Lord through his disobedience. God then sent Samuel with oil to the household of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the future King of Israel. Upon seeing the stature of the oldest son, Samuel thought he was surely the one. The Lord spoke to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16-7)

The sons of Jesse then passed before Samuel, but none of them were chosen by the Lord. Finally, the youngest son, David, who was out tending sheep was brought in and the Lord instructed Samuel to "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." (1 Samuel 16-12)

The desire of our Christian lives is that we live as good stewards of the gifts we possess. Saul was given the ability to lead the Israelites, but his failure was that he chose to give in to the requests of the people, rather than follow the commands of God. David, a mere child who was tending the sheep was chosen to be the successor. It was his faithfulness with this small task that pleased God to anoint him with greater responsibility.

Being anointed to serve bears a responsibility. Being a steward of God bears a responsibility. The words of the Lord, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one," apply to each one of us! We Orthodox Christians have been anointed with the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism. Living each day with the realization "I am the one!" leads us to greater contemplation of our actions and allows stewardship to be a source of deep joy.

Kindle Thy Lamp



The Oil of brotherhood

Psalm 133, a Psalm of David

*"How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
it is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard
down upon the collar of his robes.*

*It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*

The oil of brotherhood running down on Aaron's head evokes a feeling of harmony. This precious oil is a blessing from the Lord.

Aaron was the brother of Moses. With humility and perseverance he followed the voice of the Lord and helped his brother lead the Israelites into the promised land. The harmony between the brothers was that the weakness of one was the strength of the other. Moses was designated to lead the Israelites, a task he was fearful of because he was not an eloquent speaker. The Lord allowed Aaron to speak for him and the two labored side by side through many tribulations.

it is at the fundamental level of the family that stewardship begins in the domestic church, which is the home. Parents are stewards entrusted with teaching their family the truths of Orthodoxy, the sacraments, the importance of prayer, and by their example, loving one another. it is through this greatest commandment that we are anointed with the oil of brotherhood in the Christian family. By living an Orthodox life in the home, stewardship evolves naturally. Small acts of love lay the foundation for living together in unity!

Multiplying the Oil

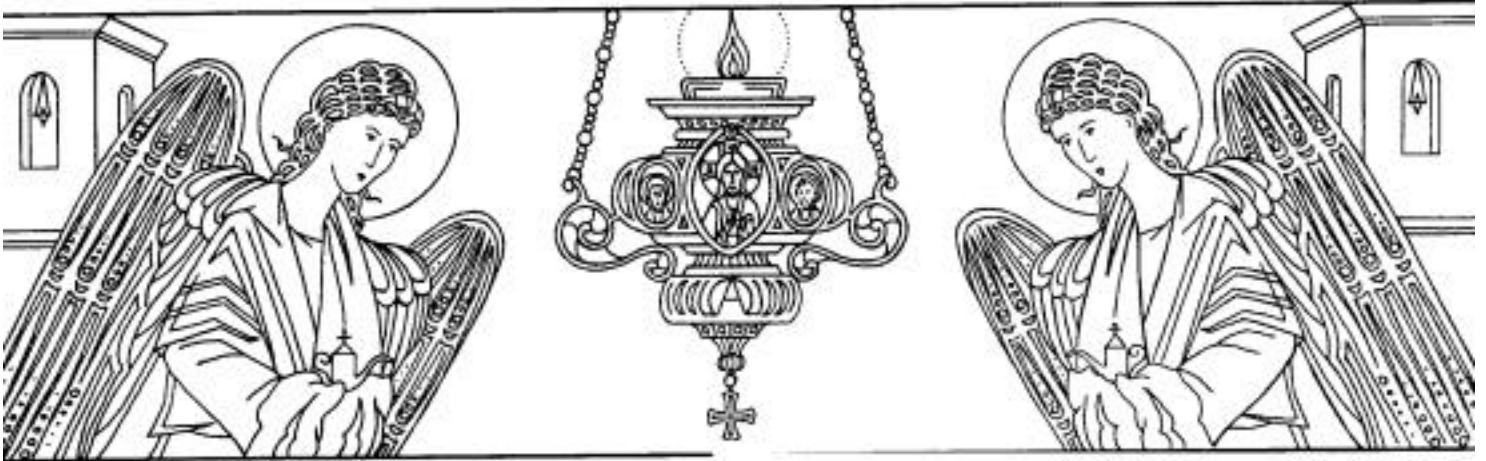
"Elisba said to her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?' She answered, 'Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.' " (2 Kings 4:2)

The widow in the prophet Elisha's day was in debt and as was the custom of the time, a creditor threatened to take her children as slaves. All the widow had was a jar with a little bit of oil in it. Elisha told her to borrow empty jars from her neighbors and to "pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." (2 Kings 4:4)

The woman's sons kept bringing her empty jars which she continued to fill with the small amount of oil that was blessed and multiplied. The oil did not stop flowing until the woman ran out of jars. Elisha instructed her to, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left." (2 Kings 4:7)

Equally remarkable was the widow's trust that God would help her. This faith turned the little she had into plenty. Stewardship works in the same way when we use our time, money and abilities to do the greatest good. God will supply the rest and multiply our endeavors as He sees the need. The widow's desperate situation, combined with her faith and her only possession, a bit of oil, teach us that "all things work for good for those who love God." (Romans 8:28)

Kindle Thy Lamp



The Oil of (Salvation)

"At midnight the cry rang out.. 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 7-foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out. '" (Matthew 25:6- 7)

Planning for our daily needs in this age of convenience is relatively easy in comparison to earlier times. Christ used this Parable of the Ten Virgins to illustrate planning for our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

When the five virgins without oil asked to borrow oil from the lamps of the wise, they were refused. As they went to buy oil, the bridegroom arrived, taking into the Kingdom the five wise virgins. Later as the five foolish returned with oil, they beckoned that the door be opened for them, and they were told by the bridegroom, "I tell you the truth, I do not know you." (Matthew 25:12)

Oil is used symbolically to represent the quality of our deeds in this life. The quality of our deeds represents our preparation for the Kingdom. The five foolish virgins were most likely very good people; however not knowing the day or the hour that the Lord would come, they were unprepared for the Kingdom of God.

Whoever chooses to follow Christ will have much work to do on His behalf. It is this work that distinguishes us as Christian stewards. As we begin with the here and now of our Orthodox Church, our families and our professions, stewardship manifests itself in our actions and generosity. This is the oil that will help our spiritual lamps to burn brightly when the bridegroom arrives!

(Sample Stewardship Appeal Letter)

Kindle, Thy Lamp

Dear Fellow Parishioner,

Take a moment to think about the many uses of oil. This precious resource has caused the rise and fall of nations and initiated great debate in terms of its value. On a spiritual level, being anointed with oil is a mystical experience, bonding us to one another and to our God.

In earlier times, oil was the medium commonly given to the Church to keep the lamps burning. Oil continues to be the offering of the Godparent at Baptism to anoint the newborn about to receive the Holy Spirit. Through each of these actions there is an on-going exchange with the Lord. The oil offered for the lamps burns brightly with the light of Christ and the oil offered for the newborn is blessed and poured upon the infant about to be baptized into the Christian family.

Each of these events reveals a mystical quality of oil. It is our response in our daily lives to this mysticism that marks us as Stewards of God. The Lord has freely given each of us unique talents and riches as ways to serve Him and spread His love to others. This is Stewardship ... the oil that bonds us to one another and to God.

We have been anointed, and it is what we do with this great gift that seals our bond to one another and to Christ. Please consider your love for Him above all else as you complete the enclosed pledge card. May God continue to bless you as you renew your bond to Christ and His Church!

We look forward to hearing from you.

In Christ's Love,

The Stewardship Committee

(Sample Stewardship Follow-up Letter)

Kindle Thy Lamp

Dear Fellow Parishioner,

The significance of oil has been a theme in our stewardship materials. In scripture, numerous references depict individuals being anointed with oil as they carry out the Lord's work. Carrying out the Lord's work here on earth is the essence of stewardship.

An offering that is given with a cheerful heart is pleasing to God. Consider the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. Her giving was a testimony to her faith and to the kind of person she was. Jesus did not emphasize how blessed this woman's life would be because of her gift, He simply noted that her giving was a testimony to the kind of person she was. Her gift was given with a cheerful heart.

Recently we sent you a Stewardship Pledge Card along with material explaining this year's theme, "STEWARDSHIP ... THE OIL THAT BONDS US". We have not yet heard from you and we ask that you take this opportunity to offer a commitment to our (name of parish) Church. Please know that your support will assist us in our mission to carry out the Lord's work.

We have enclosed a pledge card with a self-addressed envelope for your use. Your gift, like the offerings of oil given in the early Church to keep the lamps burning, is a testimony to your faith today!

May the Lord bless this offering as we continue the work of sharing His love. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

In Christ's Love

The Stewardship Committee

(Sample Stewardship 7-bank You Letter)

Kindle Thy Lamp

Dear Fellow Parishioner,

*"You anoint my head with oil,
my cup runneth over " Psalm 23:5*

And so it is with the work of the Lord! We have been anointed with oil and our cup overflows. The Lord has richly bestowed His blessing upon us. You have responded by sharing a portion with the Church, strengthening the bond that unites us to one another and to Christ. We wish to sincerely thank you for your generous commitment to the ministries of our (name of parish) Church.

Your Stewardship commitment assists us in the mission of making God's gifts available to more people. The Lord moves in mysterious ways in His Church here on earth through each one of us. With gratitude we joyfully acknowledge your contribution which answers the call for cc-workers in our Lord's Church.

Our cup runneth over with spiritual blessings. Forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and eternal life are all free gifts of God's grace, overflowing in our spiritual cups. Thank you for your response to His Love, which identifies God as the first priority in your life.

May the oil that bonds us to one another and to the work of Christ guide us on the path of the Lord's goodness and mercy all the days of our lives!

In Christ's Love,

The Stewardship Committee

