

# The Apocalypse of St. John

## Chapter Four

### A. INTRO: Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko states:

"In Orthodox/Eastern Liturgy, the 'proestos', the first in rank, sits upon the synthronon behind the altar with the presbyters who are clothed in white robes. The Christian gathering is based upon the images in Revelation of God on His throne, Christ with Him, the elders/presbyters worshipping Him and co-enthroned with Him. This image of the heavenly temple & worship, found earlier in Revelation, continues in chapters 4-5." - Dsk 2, Track 1, 14 min.

"So our Church structure taken from the Old Jerusalem Temple with its various doors and so on is patterned on the apocalyptic interpretation of the Jewish temple. And this is what you've got in chapters 4 & 5, with people even vested the way the high priest was vested, with the robes of baptism all messian-ized, Christianized and put in the light of the ultimate kingdom of God."

### B. Heavenly Temple, Heavenly Worship

The third phase of the book (1:19) begins as the Spirit lifts John into heaven at the invitation of Christ. John bombarded with a spectacular display and angels and saints worshipping the Lord and the Lamb. The next two chapters focus on this same focus of worship: Rev 4 praises the Father as the maker of all, and Rev 5 praise the Son as the Savior of all.

#### **Read 4:1**

Note 4:1

#### **Read 4:2-3**

Note 4:2-3

ICBS: The throne (4:2) is the focus of nearly all the heavenly acts of the book. From it come judgments and declarations of truth, and around it stands elders (presbuteroi) and angels engaged in never-ending worship.

ICBS: The rainbow (4:3), a spectrum of color, also hearkens back to Ezekiel's vision of the enthroned Lord (Ezek 1:38).

Fr. Hopko: There appear (4:3) all these [stones] of jasper, sardius (or carnelian), and so on, which will be the stones around the kingdom at the end of the book. These stones

are the stones of the Zodiac. In fact in Serbia there is a fresco in a monastery of "Christ over the Signs of Zodiac." In Revelation these stones are put in reverse order because it shows that the world and the horoscope -which belong to the devil- have been conquered. Christ has turned it upside down and destroyed it. So these stones are all symbolical stones of the Zodiac and are also the stones that belong to the apocalyptic images of Daniel and Ezekiel in the OT.

### Read 4:4-5

#### Note 4:4

Fr. Hopko: (4:4). Those who are seated are therefore conquering. The 24 thrones belong to the 24 elders or presbyters clad in white garments with golden crowns. Why 24 presbyters? Because 12 is a symbolic number in the Tradition. 12 stands for 'the fullness of God's people.' That's why you have 12 tribes of Israel. That's why you need 12 Apostles. That's why when Judas betrays -they have to elect someone to take his place. Because the New Testamental Church must be based on 12. So the universal interpretation for 24 presbyters is 12 from Israel and 12 from the nations. Which means "the fullness of the saved." This is what is symbolized here.

They are the presbyters around the throne, and sitting on the throne is God himself, who in the Christian Liturgy is represented by the bishop. The bishop is the image of God within the community and he alone sits on the throne in the middle (behind the altar) and around him are the presbyters. He stands for Christ Himself who is on the throne. So this is a very liturgical setting and we still do this in our Church: you have presbyters around the throne with their white robes doing it this way.

ICBS: Lightening & thundering (4:5) are reminiscent of two OT Theophanies (cf. Ex 19:16 & Ez 1:4, 13). In both occasions there was a glassy sea of clear sapphire pavement (Ex 24:10) and crystal flooring (Ezek 1:24 LXX) spread beneath the Lord.

ICBS: The seven torches represent the Holy Spirit (1:4). Seven recalls Zech 4:1-6, where the Spirit keeps the seven flames of the lamp stand burning and Is 11:2 where the LXX elaborates on the seven gifts of the Spirit that will be given to the Messiah.

### Read 4:6-7

#### Note 4:6-7

Protopres Hopko: Four Living Creatures (Rev.4:6): Four is a cosmic symbol. Because you have north, south, east, west and you have up, down, length, breadth (as St. Paul mentions in Ephesians 3:18). So four is the cosmic image. So Later in the book there is the four winds, the four corners of the earth and the four beasts, and each of the beasts stand for an element in the cosmos. The animal, the angelic, the human... so four means everything that is in creation.

ICBS: The four living creatures symbolize the glory of God expressed in creation, e.g., divine authority (lion), strength (ox), intelligence (man), and swiftness (eagle). In Church tradition they are also come to be seen as signs of the four evangelists: Matthew is the man whose Gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus; Mark is the roaring lion whose Gospel begins with the voice crying out in the wilderness; Luke is the sacrificial ox whose Gospel begins in the Temple; and John is the soaring eagle whose Gospel begins with the highest mystery of our faith.

Read 4:8

Note 4:8

ICBS: The threefold repetition is a Hebrew way of saying that God is the holiest of all.

Read 4:9-10

Read 4:11

Note 4:10

Note 4:11

Everything in creation is symbolized as before God's throne worshipping him, as it says in verse 11, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for **you created all things**... This hymn begins with words very familiar to Orthodox & Eastern Christians: 'Axion estin' = 'Worthy is he.' We use these words in our liturgy. When?