



## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

### Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Youths

16 / 29 December

*"This the second Sunday before Christmas - it calls to remembrance the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, whether before or under the Law. The Sunday that follows is still broader in scope, commemorating all the righteous men and women who pleased God from the beginning of time, from the days of Adam the first man down to Joseph, the betrothed of the Mother of God. Approaching Christmas in this way, the worshipper is enabled to see the Incarnation, not as an abrupt and irrational intervention of the divine, but as the culmination of a long process extending over thousands of years." - the Festal Menaion.*

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 2:** When Thou didst descend to death, O Life Immortal, Thou didst slay hell with the splendour of Thy Godhead! And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, all the powers of Heaven cried out: O Giver of Life, Christ our God, Glory to Thee!

**Tropar of the Holy Fathers, Tone 4:** Daniel, the man of divine desires, seeing Thee, the Stone uncut by human hands, O Lord, prophetically called Thee a babe born without seed, the Word incarnate of the Virgin, the immaculate God, the Saviour of our souls.

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**Troparion of the Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Children tone 2:** Great are the achievements of faith:/ In the fountain of flame, as in refreshing water, the Three Holy Children rejoiced./ And the Prophet Daniel proved a shepherd of lions as of sheep./ By their prayers, O Christ our God, save our souls.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 2:** Hell became afraid, O Almighty Saviour, seeing the miracle of Thy resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee! And the world, O My Saviour, praises Thee forever.

**Kondak of the Holy Fathers, Tone 6:** O thrice-blessed ones, who did not honour an image wrought by hands, but were defended by the indescribable Essence, ye were glorified in your ordeal by fire; and, standing in the midst of unbearable flame, ye called upon God, saying: Make speed and haste Thou to help us, O Compassionate One, in that Thou art merciful; who what Thou willest, Thou canst do!

**Kontakion of the Prophet Daniel tone 3:** When thy pure heart was purged by the Spirit/ thou didst become a vessel of clear prophecy;/ for thou seest things afar off as though they were close at hand./ Thou didst tame the lions when thou wast cast into their den./ Therefore we honour thee, O blessed Prophet, glorious Daniel.

**Kontakion of the Three Children in Babylon tone 2:** An image made with hands you would not worship, O thrice blessed three;/ but protected by the ineffable Essence you were glorified in your ordeal by fire./ From the midst of the devouring flames you called upon God,/ crying: Hasten, O compassionate One,/ in Thy mercy come to our aid, for if Thou willest Thou canst.

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#### Vespers:

Lord I have Cried, Tone 2, on 10: Resurrection 6; Forefathers 4 (Celebrating the memory of the forefathers today); G: Forefathers (O ye faithful); N: Sunday Dogmatic in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tone. Aposticha: Octoechos; G: Forefathers (Come, ye lovers of the feasts of the Church); N: Theotokion (Through the divine Spirit).

#### Matins Gospel V

### **Epistle: Colossians 3: 4-11**

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all.

### **DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER, SINCE YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD MAN WITH HIS DEEDS**

You shall destroy all those who utter a lie (Ps. 5:7). The mouth that speaks a lie will slay the soul (Wis. 1:11). Forasmuch as all sins arise through a love of pleasure or avarice or vainglory, we can say that lying has its roots in these three vices: a man has to avoid blame and humiliation to fulfil his own desires or to gain something ...And in the end no one believes him when he speaks the truth ...A man whose very life is a lie is one who is licentious and pretends to be temperate, or a miser and speaks of almsgiving and compassion, or ostentatious and goes in raptures over poverty, not wanting to acquire the virtue he praises ...'the devil changes himself into an angel of light' (II Cor.11:14) ...the man whose very life is a lie: he is not a simple but a two-faced man; he is one thing on the inside and another on the outside.

*St. Dorotheos of Gaza. Discourses, IX. On Falsehood. B#45, pp. 160-162.*

### **GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 14: 16-24**

Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

### **THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER**

This parable ...proclaims beforehand both the casting out of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, and it indicates together with this also the strictness of the life required, and how great the punishment appointed for the careless ...And when were they bidden? By all the prophets; by John the Baptist, again; for he would pass all on to Christ, saying 'He must increase, I must decrease' (John 3:30); by the Son Himself again, 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you' (Matt. 11:28) and again, 'If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink' (John 7:37). But not by words only, by actions also He bade them, after his ascension by Peter, and those with him. 'For He who wrought effectually in Peter,' it is said, 'to the apostleship of the circumcision, was mighty also in me towards the Gentiles,' (Gal. 2:8) ...And yet the calling was of grace. Why then does He take a strict account? Because although to be called and to be cleansed was of grace, yet, when called and clothed in clean garments, to continue keeping them so, this is of the diligence of those who are called.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily LXIX on Matthew XXII, 1, 2. B#54, pp. 421, 423.*

From this Sunday of the Holy Forefathers begins a new cycle of preparation for the Birth of Christ. This is the beginning of a new life. From the manger, the light of Christ will shine on us. And in this light will be the warmth of our adoption by God. At the manger we will feel like one family.

Something wonderful happens every year at the manger of Christ. We all begin to feel like brothers and sisters, children of one Father. And these are not just words, but reality. Love becomes manifest. There is a desire to gladden one another, to help, and to love.

And again this year, from the manger of Christ our new ways will begin: family, monastic, social, domestic, business. But all of them will guide us to one goal—to the Kingdom of God, to communion with God, to the Lord's Feast.

So let us not forget our dignity, our calling, that we are invited to the Lord's Feast. And let us spend our temporary life as pilgrims, proceeding on the paths that will bring us to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where there will be "the ceaseless sound of those keeping festival." And then we will become not only those who are called, but those who are chosen. (Mt. 22:14)

*Archbishop Alexei - The One Thing Needful,*

### **Saints of the week**

**16 / 29 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Haggai** - Born in Babylon in the time of the captivity of Israel, he was of the tribe of Levi. He prophesied in 520 B.C., and visited Jerusalem as a young man. He urged Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest to restore the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, prophesying for this Temple greater glory than the former Temple of Solomon: 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts' (2:9), for the Lord, the Saviour, would appear in the new Temple. He lived to see the first half of the new Temple completed by Zerubbabel, and died in old age, and rested with his fathers.

**St. Nicholas Chrysoverges, Patriarch of Constantinople** - Nicholas governed the Church from 980 until 995. He ordained the great Simeon the New Theologian a presbyter when this spiritual giant was elected abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Martyr Mamas in Constantinople. During his times, a miraculous appearance of the Archangel Gabriel took place at Karyes [Mount Athos]. On this occasion, the archangel taught the monks to praise the Most-holy Theotokos with the hymn "It Is Truly Meet," writing this hymn on a stone in a chapel of one of the kellia, which from that time has been called "It Is Truly Meet" (June 13). As an eminent and great hierarch, he peacefully entered into rest and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of God.

**St. Theophano the Empress** - Theophano was born of eminent parents, Constantine and Anna, who were kin to several emperors. Her parents were childless for a long time and prayed to the Most-holy Theotokos to give them an offspring. And God gave them this daughter, Theophano. Imbued with the Christian spirit from her childhood, Theophano surpassed all her companions in all the Christian virtues. When she grew up, she entered into marriage with Leo, the son of Emperor Basil the Macedonian. She endured great hardships alongside her husband. Responding to slander—that Leo carried a knife in his boot and planned to kill his father at an opportune time—the gullible father, Basil, locked his son and daughter-in-law in prison. Thus, two innocent souls languished in prison for three years. Once, during the Feast of the Prophet Elias, the emperor summoned all his noblemen to his court for a banquet. Suddenly the emperor's parrot unexpectedly spoke these words, "Alas, alas, my Lord Leo!" and repeated these words a number of times. This brought great anxiety to all of the imperial noblemen, and they all begged the emperor to release his son and daughter-in-law. The grieved emperor did so. After his father's death, Leo became emperor and was called "the Wise." Theophano did not consider her imperial dignity as anything, but, completely devoted to God, she cared only about the salvation of her soul, fasting and praying, distributing many alms, and restoring many monasteries and churches. Neither an untrue word nor an excessive word nor, least of all, slander proceeded from her lips. Before her death she called all her closest friends, took leave of them and gave up her soul to her God in the year 892. The Emperor Leo wanted to build a church over her grave in her name, but since the patriarch objected to this, he built a church to All Saints, saying that if Theophano became a saint, she would be glorified together with the other saints. The Feast of All Saints was then instituted to be celebrated on the Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyr Marinus of Rome (283); St. Irenion, bishop of Gaza (4th C); St. Memnon, archbishop of Ephesus (440); St. Symeon, archbishop of Antioch (892); Venerable Sophia, in the world Princess Solomonia (1542); Venerable Daniel of Achinsk (1843); New Hieromartyr Vladimir Alexeyev, priest (1918); New Hieromartyrs Arcadius, bishop of Poltava, Alexander Kolokolov, Vladimir Damaskin, Elias Cheredeev, Paul Favoritov, Peter Zinoviev, Theodosius Boldiriev, priests, and Monk-martyr Macarius (Smirnov) (1937).

**17 / 30 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Daniel, and the Three Children: Ananias, Azarias and Misael** - All four of them were of the royal tribe of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and plundered Jerusalem, Daniel, as a boy, was taken off into slavery together with Jehoiachin, King of Judah, and many other Israelites. The account of his life, sufferings and prophecies can be found in detail in his book. Utterly given to God, Daniel from his early youth received from God the gift of great discernment. His fame among the Jews in Babylon began when he denounced two lecherous and unrighteous elders, and saved the chaste Susannah from an unjust death. But his fame among the Babylonians stemmed from the day when he solved and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. For this, the king made him a prince at his court. When the king made a golden idol in the Plain of Dura, the Three Children refused to worship it, for which they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. But an angel of God appeared in the furnace and soothed the flames, so that the Children walked in the furnace untouched by the fire, and sang: 'Blessed art Thou, Lord God of our fathers!' The king saw this marvel, and was amazed. He then brought the Children out of the furnace and did them great honour. In the time of King Belshazzar, when the king was eating and drinking with his guests at a feast out of consecrated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, an invisible hand wrote these three words on the wall: 'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin'. No-one could interpret these words but Daniel. That night, King Belshazzar was killed. Daniel was thrice thrown into a den of lions for his faith in the one, living God, and both times God preserved him alive. Daniel saw God on His throne with the angelic powers, often saw angels, had insight into the future of certain people, of kingdoms and of the whole human race, and prophesied the time of the coming of the Saviour on earth. According to St Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel and the Three Children lived to great old age in Babylon, and were beheaded with the sword for the true Faith. When Ananias was beheaded, Azarias held out his robe and caught his head, then Misael caught Azarias's head and Daniel Misael's. An angel of God carried their bodies to Judea, to Mount Gebal, and placed them under a rock. According to tradition, these four men arose at the time of the death of the Lord Jesus and appeared to many, then fell asleep again. Daniel is counted as one of the four Great Prophets (with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). He lived and prophesied half- way through the thousand years before Christ.

**St. Tydecho, brother of St. Cadfan.** Whose tropar in Tone 8 is: By thy labours for Christ, O Father Tydecho,/ thou didst win the crown of eternal glory/ and didst light the way into the Ark of Salvation./ Wherefore, O Saint, intercede for us that in following thee we may be found worthy of Christ's great mercy. Born in Wales. Several Welsh churches are named for him. No other information has survived.

**Also commemorated on this day:** St. Tobias, bishop of Jerusalem (2nd C); Venerable Daniel the Confessor, in Schema Stephen (10th C); Venerable Athanasius, Nicholas, and Anthony of Vatopedi (10th C); Martyr Nicetas of Nyssa (c.1300); St. Dionysius of Zakynthos, archbishop of Aegina (1622); Hieromartyrs Paisius of Turnovo, and Abbacum, deacon at Belgrade (1814); Venerable Misael of Abalatsk (1852); New Hieromartyrs Alexander Savelov, Nicholas Beltiukov, Sergius Florinsky, priests (1918); New Hieromartyrs Peter Pokrovsky, John Zemlyani, priests (1937).

**18 / 31 December — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Sebastian and those with him** - This glorious martyr of Christ was born in Italy and brought up in the city of Milan. He was destined in his youth to be a soldier, and, as an educated, handsome and courageous man, commended himself to the Emperor Diocletian, who made him captain of the imperial guard. He secretly confessed the Christian faith, and prayed to the living God. An honourable, upright and merciful man, Sebastian was greatly loved by his soldiers. Whenever possible, he saved Christians from torture and death and, when this was not possible, gave them courage to die for Christ the living God without turning back. Two brothers, Marcus and Marcellinus, who were in prison for Christ and already on the verge of denying Him and worshipping idols, were confirmed in their faith and strengthened in their martyrdom by Sebastian. As he spoke with them, exhorting them not to fear death for Christ, his face was illumined like that of an angel of God. Sebastian supported his words by marvels: he healed Zoe, the wife of Nicostratus the gaoler, who had been dumb for six years, and brought Nicostratus and his whole household to baptism; he healed the two sick sons of Claudius the commander, and brought him and his whole household also to baptism; he healed Tranquillianus, the father of Marcus and Marcellinus, of gout and pains in his legs which had troubled him for eleven years, and brought him to baptism together with his whole household; he healed the Roman Eparch, Chromatius, of the same infirmity and brought him and his son Tiburtius to baptism. Of these, Zoe was the first to suffer, being seized while at prayer beside the tomb of the Apostle Peter. After torture, she was thrown into the river Tiber. Then Tiburtius was seized, and the judge placed live coals before him, challenging him to choose life or death: to cast incense on the coals and cense the idols, or to stand himself barefoot on the coals. St Tibertius made the sign of the Cross and stood barefoot on the coals, and remained unharmed. He was then beheaded with the sword. Nicostratus was killed with a stake, Tranquillianus was drowned and Marcus and Marcellinus were run through by spears. Then Sebastian was taken before the Emperor Diocletian. The Emperor rebuked him for his betrayal, but he said: 'I always pray to my Christ for your health, and for the peace of the Roman Empire.' The Emperor ordered that he be stripped and shot at with arrows. The soldiers then shot at him, until the martyr's whole body was so covered with arrows that it was invisible beneath them. When they

thought that he was dead, he showed himself alive and healed of all his wounds. Then the pagans beat him to death with staves. He suffered gloriously for Christ his Lord and entered into the heavenly Kingdom in 287, when Gaius was Bishop of Rome.

**Martyrdom of Hieromonk Nestor of Zharki (Ivanova), defender of the holy icons (1993)** - in the world Nestor Savchuk was born in Crimea in 1960. An artist, he travelled to Odessa in the early 1980's to undertake further studies. There he came in contact with Orthodox Christians, afterwards journeying to the Pochaev monastery where he was tonsured and later ordained a priest. An 'unregistered' monk, he fled the authorities and settled in Zharki, where he served in the church and ministered to the people. He struggled with great courage against the Russian Mafia which was at that time stealing the holy icons from the churches for sale abroad. He was murdered on December 18, 1993, at the age of 33, defending the church from thieves.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyrs Nicostratus, the imperial treasurer, his wife Zoe, Castorius, Tranquillinus the priest, and his sons Marcellinus and Mark, deacons, Claudius, the prison warden, his son Symphorian, brother Victorinus, Tiburtius, and Castulus (287); St. Gatianus, bishop of Tours (3rd C); Martyr Eubotius of Cyzicus (318); Venerable Florus, bishop of Amisus (7th C); Venerable Winebald of Heidenheim (761); Venerable Michael the synkellos, confessor (c.845); Venerable Daniel the Hesychast of Voronet (15th C); Venerable Sebastian of Poshekhonye (c.1500); Glorification of Venerable Symeon, of Verkhoturye (1694); New Martyr Victor Matveev (1936); New Hieromartyrs Thaddeus, archbishop of Tver, Nicholas, archbishop of Veliky Ustyug, Vladimir Preobrazhensky, Elias Benemansky, John Mironsky, and Nicholas Kobranov, priests (1937); New Hieromartyr Sergius Astakhov, deacon, and Martyr Vera Truks (1942).

**19 December / 1 January — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Boniface** - Martyrdom for Christ makes sinners into saints. This is shown by the example of St Boniface. He was at first servant to a wealthy and dissolute woman, Aglais, in Rome, and had unclean and unlawful relations with her. They were both pagans. Aglais evinced the desire to have the relics of some martyr in her house as an amulet against evil, so she sent her servant to Asia to find and buy for her what she desired. Boniface took some slaves with him and a fair amount of money and, at the moment of parting, said to Aglais: 'If I can't find any martyrs and if they bring you back my body, martyred for Christ, will you receive it with honour? Aglais laughed, and called him a drunken old sinner, and so they parted. Coming to the city of Tarsus, Boniface saw many Christians undergoing torture: some were having their legs cut off, some their hands, others their eyes put out, yet others were dying on the gallows and so forth. Boniface's heart was changed, and he repented of his sinful life with tears. He called out among the Christian martyrs: 'I too am a Christian!' The judge took him for interrogation and ordered that he be harshly flogged, then that boiling lead be poured into his mouth and, as this did him no harm, that he be beheaded. The slaves then took his body back to Rome. An angel of God appeared to Aglais and said: 'Take him who was at one time your servant, but is now our brother and fellow-servant; he is the guardian of your soul and the protector of your life.' Aglais went in wonder to meet them, took Boniface's body, built a church for his relics and placed them there. She then repented, gave away all her goods to the poor and withdrew from the world, living a further fifteen years in bitter penitence. St Boniface suffered in the year 290.

**St. Gregory, bishop of Omir** - At first, Gregory was a deacon in a church in Mediolanum [Milan] and had many visions. By God's providence he was taken to Alexandria. There Patriarch Proterius, according to a heavenly revelation, consecrated him bishop of the land of Omir in southern Arabia, which St. Elesbaan the King (October 24) had just freed from the tyranny of Dunaan the Jew. He was a good shepherd and great miracle-worker. He organized the Church in Omir with the help of the Christ-loving King Abramius, built many churches, and baptized many Jews. By his prayers he performed great and awesome miracles, even bringing about a revelation of Christ the Lord before the unbelieving Jews, which led to their baptism. He governed the Church for thirty years and entered peacefully into life eternal in the year 552.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Righteous Aglae (Aglaida) of Rome (c.308); Righteous Susanna the Chaste (6th C BC); Martyr Nemesius of Alexandria (250); Martyrs Meurisa and Thea (3rd C); Martyrs Elias, Probus, and Ares (308); Martyrs Polyeuctus of Caesarea in Cappadocia and Timothy (309); Venerable Boniface the Merciful, bishop of Ferentino (6th C); Venerable George and Sabbas of Khakhuli (11th C); Venerable Elias of Murom, wonderworker of the Kiev Caves (1188); Venerable Amphilochius of Pochaev (1971); Martyr Tryphon the priest

**20 December / 2 January — Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast - Repose of St John of Kronstadt.** - a great luminary of the Russian Church. A married priest, he served in the Cathedral of St. Andrew's in Kronstadt, a busy port near St. Petersburg. A great man of prayer, he served Divine Liturgy every day and read the entire cycle of daily services. He visited the poor and the sick, generously giving alms, himself often going without. He and his matushka lived as brother and sister. He taught and advised all those who came to him, young and old, rich and poor. Such was the love of the people for him

throughout Russia that the Kronstadt post office had a special section just for St. John! Even during his lifetime hundreds were healed through his holy prayers. In 1906, he became very ill and suffered with this sickness until his death. Nevertheless, he continued to serve daily. On December 20, 1908, he quietly reposed in the Lord. A crowd of 60,000 attended his funeral, an unprecedented event in Russia. He was formally glorified as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad on June 3, 1964. Holy blessed Father John, pray to God for us!

**Tropar, 4th Tone:** With the apostles thy sound hath gone forth unto the ends of the world; / with the confessors thou didst endure sufferings for Christ; / thou didst liken thyself unto the holy hierarchs in the preaching of the Word; / and with the venerable hast thou shone forth in the grace of God. / Therefore, the Lord hath exalted the depths of the humility higher than the heavens, / and hath given us thy name as a source of most wondrous miracles. / Wherefore, O wonderworker, who livest in Christ forever, / lovingly have mercy upon those amid misfortunes, / and hearken unto thy children that call upon thee with faith, / O Righteous John, // our beloved pastor.

**Kontakion, 4th Tone:** O thou who from infancy wast chosen by God, / and in childhood didst miraculously receive from Him the gift of learning, / and wast gloriously called to the priesthood in a vision during sleep, / thou didst prove to be a wonderful shepherd of the Church of Christ, / O Father John, namesake of grace. / Pray to Christ our God // that we all be with thee in the kingdom of the heavens.

**The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer** - This holy man was named the 'God-Bearer' because he always carried the name of the living God in his heart and on his lips. Also, by tradition, he was thus named because he was held in the arms of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. On a day when the Lord was teaching His disciples humility, He took a child and set it among them, saying: 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:4). This child was Ignatius. He was later a disciple of St John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. As bishop in Antioch, he governed the Church of God as a good shepherd, and was the first to introduce antiphonal singing into the Church, in which two choirs alternate. This way of singing was revealed to St Ignatius from among the angels in heaven. When the Emperor Trajan passed through Antioch on his way to battle with the Persians, he heard about Ignatius, summoned him and urged him to offer sacrifice to idols, so that he could be made a senator. The Emperor's urgings and threats being in vain, holy Ignatius was put in irons and sent to Rome, escorted by ten bestial soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts. Ignatius rejoiced to be suffering for his Lord, and prayed to God that the wild beasts should be the tomb for his body, and that none should hinder his death. After a long and difficult journey from Asia through Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, Ignatius reached Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the circus. They tore him to pieces and devoured him, leaving only a few of the larger bones and his heart. This glorious lover of the Lord Christ suffered in the year 106 in Rome, in the time of the Emperor Trajan. He appeared many times from the other world and worked wonders, helping to this day all who call on him for help.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Righteous Esther (5th C BC); St. Philogonius, bishop of Antioch (323); St. Daniel, archbishop of Serbia (1338); Venerable Ignatius, archimandrite of the Kiev Caves (1435); Martyr John the Youth of Thasos (1652); St. Anthony, archbishop of Voronezh and Zadonsk (1846); New Hieromartyr Nikolai Chernishev, priest, and his daughter Martyr Barbara (1919); 'Novgorod', and 'Lenkovskaya' or 'Rescuer of the Drowning' Icons of the Mother of God.

**21 December / 3 January — Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Juliana and the 630 martyrs with her** - This glorious virgin martyr was born in Nicomedia of pagan parents. Hearing the Gospel preached, she turned to Christ with all her heart and began to live in exact observance of the Lord's commandments. A certain senator, Eleusius, was her betrothed. In order to free herself from him, Juliana told him that she would not marry him unless he became eparch of that city. She said this thinking that the young man would not be in the least likely to attain to such a high position, but Eleusius worked at it, and, by flattery and bribes, gained the post of Eparch of Nicomedia. Juliana then revealed to him that she was a Christian, and could not enter into marriage with him unless he accepted her faith, saying: 'What would it profit us to be united physically but divided in spirit?' Eleusius was exasperated, and denounced her to her father. Her furious father poured scorn on her and whipped her, and then handed her over to the eparch for torture. The eparch ordered that she be harshly beaten, then she was thrown into prison all torn and bleeding. But the Lord healed her in the prison, and she appeared before the eparch whole and unharmed. He then put her into a glowing furnace, but the fire did not burn her. Seeing this wonder, many came to believe in Christ the Lord. Five hundred men and a hundred and thirty women were converted. The eparch condemned them all to death, and ordered that they be beheaded with the sword, and their souls entered into Paradise. Then the wicked judge condemned holy Juliana to be beheaded with the sword. Rejoicing in spirit, Juliana went out to the scaffold, prayed on her knees to God and laid her head on the block. Her head was cut off, and her soul went to Christ's eternal Kingdom of light, in the year 304.

God's punishment quickly fell on Eleusius: sailing over the sea, his ship broke up and he fell into the water. He did not find death in the waves, but swam to an island, where the dogs tore him to pieces and devoured him.

**St. Peter the Wonderworker, Metropolitan of Russia** - Peter was born in the province of Volhynia and embraced the monastic life at the age of twelve. He was a wonderful ascetic and iconographer. He founded a monastery on the river Rata and became its abbot. Against his will, he was appointed Metropolitan of Kiev and consecrated in Constantinople by Patriarch Athanasius. As metropolitan, he endured much at the hands of the envious and the heretics. He governed the Church for eighteen years as a good and zealous shepherd. During his lifetime he built a crypt for himself in the Church of the Dormition, where his holy and miracle-working relics repose even today. He entered into rest in the year 1326 and went to his true homeland.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyr Themistocles of Myra in Lycia (251); Venerable Macarius of Khakhuli (1034); St. Juliana, princess of Viazma (1406); Blessed Procopius of Viatka, fool-for-Christ (1627); St. Anthony II, catholicos of Georgia (1827); St. Philaret (Theodosius in schema), metropolitan of Kiev (1857); New Hieromartyr Michael Kiselev, priest (1918); New Hieromartyr Sergius, deacon (1937); New Hieromartyr Nicetas, bishop of Belev (1938); New Hieromartyr Leontius Strotsyuk, deacon (1940).

**22 December / 4 January — Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast — The Holy and Great Martyr Anastasia, the Deliverer from Bonds, and those with her** - This great heroine of the Christian faith was born in Rome into a wealthy senatorial family, her father being a pagan and her mother a Christian. From her early youth, she clave in love to the Lord Jesus, guided in Christian teaching by a devout teacher, Chrysogonus. Under pressure from her father, Anastasia married a pagan landowner, Publius, but, using the pretext of woman's weakness, she never had physical relations with him. For this, her husband tortured her harshly by imprisonment and starvation, and laid even heavier tortures on her when he discovered that she went secretly to the prisons of the Christian martyrs, ministering to their needs, washing their wounds and loosening their bonds. But, by God's providence, she was freed from her wicked husband. Publius was sent to Persia by the Emperor, and was drowned on the voyage. Then St Anastasia began to minister openly to the Christian martyrs and, from her great inheritance, helped the poor with alms. The Emperor Diocletian was once in the town of Aquileia, and commanded that Chrysogonus, the confessor of Christ, be brought to him. As he was being brought, Anastasia followed him on the way. Holy Chrysogonus was beheaded at the Emperor's command, and then three sisters, Agapia, Chionia and Irene (April 16th) suffered, the first two being cast into fire and the third shot through with arrows. St Anastasia took their bodies, wrapped them in white linen and, anointing them with aromatic spices, gave them burial. Then Anastasia went to Macedonia, where she ministered to those who were suffering for Christ. There, she became widely-known as a Christian, for which she was seized and taken for interrogation before various judges. Desiring to die for her beloved Christ, Anastasia constantly clung to Him in her heart. A certain pagan high priest, Ulphian, tried to touch St Anastasia's body out of lust, but he was suddenly blinded and gave up the ghost. Condemned to death by starvation, St Anastasia lay in prison for thirty days, nourishing herself only with tears and prayers. After that she was put in a boat with several other Christians to be drowned, but God saved her from this death. She was finally tied hand and foot to four wheels over a fire, and thus gave her holy soul into God's hands. She suffered and entered into Christ's Kingdom in 304.

**The Holy Martyr Theodota with her Three Children** - Being left a young widow with three children, Theodota gave herself completely to the service of God and the rearing of her children in devout faith. St. Anastasia lived with her when she was in Macedonia, and together they visited the Christian prisoners in the jails. Brought to trial, Theodota boldly confessed Christ the Lord. Then she was sent to Nicetas, the proconsul of Bithynia. When a shameless pagan tried to touch her body, he immediately saw an angel of God beside her and was struck by the angel. Condemned to death and cast into a fiery furnace together with her three children, St. Theodota honorably ended her earthly life and entered into the Kingdom of Eternal Glory.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Righteous Alexander, priest, of Chagra (1900); New Hieromartyrs Demetrius Kiranov and Theodore Poroikov, priests (1938); Righteous Boris Talantov, confessor (1971).

## ‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

**Monday** - 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Mark 9:42-10:1; Hebrews 11:33-12:2 (Prophet); Luke 11:47-12:1 (Prophet)

**Tuesday** - 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; Mark 10:2-12

**Wednesday** - 2 Timothy 4:9-22; Mark 10:11-16

**Thursday** - Matthew 6:1-13 (Matins Gospel); Titus 1:5-2:1; Mark 10:17-27; Hebrews 4:14-5:6 (St. John);  
Matthew 5:14-19 (St. John); Hebrews 4:14-5:6 (Hieromartyr Ignatius); Mark 9:33-41 (Hieromartyr  
Ignatius)

**Friday** - John 10:1-9 (Matins Gospel); Titus 1:15-2:1-10; Mark 10:23-32; Hebrews 7:26-8:2 (St. Peter);  
Luke 6:17-23 (St. Peter)

**Saturday** - Ephesians 1:16-23; Luke 16:10-15; Galatians 3:8-12 ; Luke 13:18-29

## HYMN OF PRAISE

### The Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Children

Whoever fears the true God Is not afraid of men or demons. The Lord rewards faithful servants And guards them from every evil.

Among the lions, Holy Daniel remained unharmed; In the fiery furnace, The Three Children remained alive; In the midst of the fire, they glorified God, With an angel, God's messenger. Like Noah in the evil world, Like holy Lot in wild Sodom, And like Joseph in decadent Egypt, So Daniel in the middle of Babylon Remained faithful and righteous With three of his young friends:

Ananias and Azarias And the faithful young Misael. The tortures came and the tortures passed. The martyred were gloriously glorified In the Immortal Kingdom of Christ.

## REFLECTION

Bodily purity is primarily attained by fasting, and, through bodily purity, spiritual purity is also attained. Abstinence from food, according to the words of that son of grace, St. Ephraim the Syrian, means: ``Not to desire or ask for various foods, either sweet or costly; not to eat anything outside the designated time; not to succumb to the spirit of gluttony; not to excite hunger in oneself by looking at good food; and not to desire at one moment one kind of food and at another moment another kind of food." Great is the fallacy that fasting and Lenten food harm the health of the body. It is a known fact that the ascetics lived the longest and were the least prone to illness. St. Daniel and the Three Children in Babylon offer us an example of this. When the king ordered his eunuch to feed these young men food from the royal table and to give them good wine to drink, Daniel told the eunuch that they did not want to accept the royal food and wine but wanted only vegetables for food (for Daniel did not want to eat the food sprinkled with the blood of the idolatrous sacrifices). The eunuch, fearing that the youths would be weakened by the fasting foods, related his fear to Daniel. Then the prophet suggested that he make a test and convince himself that the fasting food would not weaken them: to nourish the other youths at the royal court with food from the king's table, and to feed the four of them only on pulse for the course of ten days, and then make a comparison. The eunuch heeded Daniel and did what he suggested. After ten days, the faces of the four ascetic youths were more radiant and their bodies were stronger than the bodies of the Babylonian youths who ate and drank from the king's table.