

# 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost Sunday before the Nativity of Christ, of the Holy Fathers

23 December / 5 January

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 3:** Let the heavens rejoice / let the earth be glad / for the Lord has shown strength with His arm! / He has trampled down death by death! / He has become the first-born of the dead! He has delivered us from the depths of hell / and has granted the world great mercy.

**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.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 3:** On this day thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, / leading us from the gates of death / On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices. / With the prophets and the patriarchs they unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

**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!



## Vespers

Lord I have Cried, Tone 3, on 10: Resurrection 4; Forefeast 3 (The never-setting Sun); Fathers 3 (Unto the ends of the earth); G: Fathers (Daniel, the man of divine desires); N: Forefeast (Splendidly adorn thyself, O cave). 3 Readings: Gen. 14:14-20; Deut. 1:8-11, 15-17; Deut. 10:14-21 Aposticha: Octoechos; G: Fathers (Rejoice, ye honorable prophets); N: Forefeast (Behold, the hour of our salvation draweth nigh).

## Matins Gospel VI

### Epistle: Hebrews 11: 9-10, 17-23, 32-40

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," Concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- Of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

### **BY FAITH ABRAHAM OBEYED**

Great indeed was the faith of Abraham ...It was necessary to go beyond human reasoning... to manifest also something more. For what was of God seemed to be opposed to what was of God; and faith opposed to faith, and command promise. I mean this: He had said, 'Get out of your country and from your kindred, and I will give you this land' (Gen. 12: 1-7) ...Do you see how what was done was opposed to the promise? Again He said, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called' (Gen. 21:12), and he believed: and again He says, Sacrifice to Me this one. who was to fill all the world from his seed. You see the opposition between the commands and the promise? He enjoined things that were in contradiction to the promises, and yet not even so did the righteous man stagger, nor say he had been deceived. For you indeed ...he promised rest and gave tribulation ...And he shows another thing too by saying 'God tempted Abraham' (Gen. 22:1). What then? Did not God know that the man was noble and approved? Why then did he tempt him? Not that He might Himself learn, but that He might show others, and make his fortitude manifest to all And here also He shows the cause of trials, that they may not suppose they suffer these things as being forsaken of God.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXV on Hebrews XI. I, 2. B#58, pp. 477-478*

### **Gospel: St Matthew 1: 1-25**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, And Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, And did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

### **THE ANCESTRY OF CHRIST**

The tribes of Judah and Levi were united by a fusion of their lines of descent, and that is why Matthew assigns Christ's family to the tribe of Judah. And the Apostle says, 'for our Lord has sprung out of Judah' (Heb. 7: 14). Thus, from the tribe of Levi may be counted a heritage that is priestly and filled with holiness, while from the tribe of Judah -to which David and Solomon and the rest of the kings belonged -there shines forth the splendour of a royal descent And so, by the testimony of the Scriptures, Christ is shown to be at once both king and priest.

*St. Ambrose of Milan. Seven Exegetical Works. B#11, Vol. 65,p.250*

"Adam... where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). This is the voice of God which resounded in Adam's conscience after the Fall and tormented him. As long as Adam was in obedience to God-cultivated and kept Paradise, receiving strength for this by eating the fruits of the Tree of Life-he was in ceaseless communion with God. In his heart there was continuous quiet and joy. But after tasting of the forbidden fruits of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the thread of communion with God was broken in Adam's heart. Sin stood as a wall between God and man. From this very time began a new history of man's life on earth. Man now lived under a curse and in the sweat of his face obtained his bread. But in spite of all his labours, he did not obtain a joyful heart. His life went on in sin. This sin was washed away by the Flood, but sin continued to possess man; and the confusion of Babel filled the whole world. But in this darkness, in this inconsolable anguish, we find a man who sought spiritual joy. This is Abraham. To him was given the law of life, and as a promise, the coming to earth of the Saviour of the world, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Centuries went by; people impatiently awaited the promised Messiah. People longed to be freed from sin, but without the Tree of Life, the promised Messiah, this was impossible. And finally the fulfilment of times is accomplished. The Saviour of the world from sin comes to earth. He fulfils the commandment. given to man, of love for God and neighbour. But above all, He restores that Tree of Life which was in Paradise, which helped Adam to be in communion with God. Here are the words with which the Lord Himself announced this New Testamental communion with God: "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56).

Today the holy Church in the Gospel reading lists the names of those men who were the righteous ones and prepared for the appearance of the Saviour. We call them the Fathers. By their lives they also give us the hope of receiving that joy of Paradise and peace of heart which Adam possessed in Paradise. And this is why we so reverently and prayerfully ask them today to help us to be partakers of this worldwide joy, the Nativity of Christ.

"Adam... where art thou?" So even now this eternal question resounds in our conscience. Of course, not in a geographical sense: God knows where each of us is. But in relation to Him -to God. O, let us not leave this question unanswered! Let us be able to say: I am here, Lord, at Thy manger, in Thy Church, before Thy Chalice- "I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ. the Son of the Living God, Who came into the world to save sinners...."

*Archbishop Andrei, "The One Thing Needful"*

### **Saints of the week**

**23 December / 5 January — Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast — The Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete** - They suffered for Christ the Lord during Decius's persecution, in the year 250. Their names were: Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompey, Agathopous, Basilides and Evaristus. They were all honoured and eminent citizens, the cream of the cream. When they were taken to the scaffold, they were filled with joy and discussed among themselves who would be the first to be beheaded, because each wanted to be the first to go to his beloved Christ. Then they prayed: 'O Lord, forgive Thy servants and accept our outpoured blood on our own behalf and that of our kinsfolk and friends and all our fatherland, that all may be released from the darkness of ignorance and come to know Thee, the true light, O eternal King!' They were beheaded and entered into the Kingdom of glory, to eternal rejoicing.

**St. Niphon the Wonderworker** - Niphon was born in Paphlagonia and brought up in Constantinople at the court of a commander [Sabbatius]. Falling into evil company, the young Niphon became dissolute and gave himself over to many sins and vices. Because of his sin, he could not even pray to God. By the mercy of the Most-holy Theotokos, he was brought back to the path of righteousness and was tonsured a monk. He had numerous visions of the heavenly world, and for four years he endured a difficult struggle with a demon, who constantly whispered to him: ``There is no God! There is no God!" But, when the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him alive on an icon, Niphon received great power over evil spirits and was freed from these grievous temptations. He was such a great seer that he saw angels and demons around men just as clearly as he saw men themselves, and he knew the thoughts of men. He often spoke with angels and disputed with demons. He built a church to the Most-holy Theotokos in Constantinople, gathered monks together, and saved many souls. Alexander, the Archbishop of Alexandria, according to a revelation from heaven, consecrated him bishop of the town of Constantia on Cyprus. At that time St. Niphon was already old. He governed well the Church of God for a short time and took up his habitation in Christ's Eternal Kingdom. Before his death he was visited by St. Athanasius the Great, then the archdeacon of the Church in Alexandria, and after his death he was seen by Athanasius, his face shining as the sun.

**The Venerable Nahum, Wonderworker of Ohrid** - Nahum was a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius and one of the Five Companions who most zealously labored with these Apostles to the Slavs. St. Nahum traveled to Rome, where he became well known for his miracle-working power as well as his great learning. He was knowledgeable in many languages. After his return from Rome, he and his companions settled on the shores of Lake Ohrid with the help of King Boris Michael. While St. Clement labored as bishop in Ohrid, St. Nahum founded a monastery on the southern shore of the lake. The monastery even today adorns that shore, just as the name of St. Nahum adorns the history of Slavic Christianity and has been a source of miraculous power and a refuge for the sick and the unfortunate through the ages. Many monks from throughout the Balkans gathered around St. Nahum. St. Nahum was a wise teacher, a unique leader of monks, a resolute ascetic, a miracle-working intercessor, and a spiritual father. A tireless worker, St. Nahum labored especially on the translation of the Sacred Scriptures and other ecclesiastical books from the Greek language into the Slavonic. He worked miracles both during his life and after his death. His miracle-working relics, to this day, amaze many with numerous miracles, healing grave illnesses, especially insanity. Nahum entered into rest in the first half of the tenth century and took up his habitation in the joy of his beloved Christ.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Venerable Paul, bishop of Neo-Caesarea (4th C); St. David of Echmiadzin (703); St. Theoctistus, archbishop of Novgorod (1310); New Hieromartyr Paul, bishop of Starobel'sk (1931); New Hieromartyr Basil Spassky, priest, Monk-martyr Macarius (Mironov) and Jonah (Smirnov) (1938).

**24 December / 6 January — The Eve of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast** - Our Holy Mother, the Martyr Eugenia, and those with her - the daughter of Philip, Eparch of all Egypt, she was born in Rome. At that time, the Christians had been driven out of Alexandria and were living outside the town. The maiden Eugenia visited the Christians and received their Faith with all her heart. She fled from her parents with her two faithful eunuchs, was baptised by Bishop Elias and, wearing man's clothing, went to a men's monastery where she received the monastic habit. She so purified her heart by voluntary asceticism that she received from God the gift of healing the sick, and thus healed a rich woman, Melanthia. After this, though, the woman conceived a physical passion for her, not suspecting that she was a woman. Being firmly repulsed by Eugenia, this wicked woman, out of revenge, went to the Eparch and slandered her just as Potiphar's wife had slandered chaste Joseph. The eparch ordered that all the monks be bound and thrown into prison together with Eugenia. When they were brought out for trial, Eugenia revealed herself to her father as his daughter. The overjoyed Philip was baptised, with his whole household, and Philip was chosen as Bishop of Alexandria. Hearing of this, the Roman Emperor sent a wicked general, Terence, who, coming to Alexandria, secretly killed Philip. Then St Eugenia moved to Rome with her mother and brothers. In Rome, she fearlessly and zealously brought pagans to the true Faith, especially maidens, and thus brought a beautiful maiden, Vassilia, to the Faith. Vassilia was quickly beheaded for Christ, as Eugenia had foretold to her, and then her two eunuchs, Protus and Hyacinthus, were beheaded. Finally, martyrdom came to Eugenia, whose presence had caused the Temple of Diana to fall in ruins. The torturers first threw her into water and then into fire, but God preserved her. The Lord Jesus Himself appeared to her in the prison and told her that she would suffer on the day of His Nativity. And so it came about. She was beheaded with the sword on December 25th, 262, in Rome. After her death, Eugenia appeared to her mother in great glory, and comforted her.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Venerable Vitimionus of Scetis (4th C); Venerable Aphrodisius of Palestine (6th C); Venerable Antiochus of Palestine (c.635); Venerable Nicholas, monk of Bulgaria (9th C); Martyr Achmed (Ahmet) the calligrapher of Constantinople (1682); New Monk-martyr Innocent (Beda) (1928); New Hieromartyr Sergius Mechev, priest (1942).

**Feast of the Nativity of Christ** - The Christian Church annually celebrates the great event of the Nativity of Christ on the twenty-fifth of December (O.S.). In order to more worthily celebrate, the faithful prepare with a forty-day fast called the Nativity or Philip's fast, lasting from the fifteenth of November until the twenty-fourth of December. The eve of the feast is kept with an especially strict fast. Special food is set out only at the end of the day, consisting mainly of boiled wheat with honey or other lenten dishes, depending on the custom. On the eve of the feast, if it does not occur on a Saturday or Sunday, the Royal Hours are served, and around noon the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great with Vespers. On the feast day itself, the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated. The Hours which are served on the eve of the Nativity of Christ are distinguished by the fact that Old Testament readings are included as well as readings from the Epistle and Gospel. Therefore, to distinguish them from the usual services of the Hours they are termed Royal Hours. This designation also refers to the custom in the Byzantine Empire of the Emperor being present for them. After the Liturgy a candle is placed in the center of the church behind the icon of the feast, and the clergy chant the troparion of the feast, "Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined upon the world the light of knowledge; for thereby they that worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory be to Thee."

This is followed by the kontakion of the feast: "Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. Angels with shepherds give glory; with a star the Magi do journey; for our sake a young Child is born, Who is pre-eternal God." If the eve falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the Royal Hours are read on Friday. On the eve itself the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is served, followed by Vespers. The glorification of Christ occurs after Vespers. The fast, which is required by the Typicon, is waived in this instance so that after the Liturgy, before the evening, one is permitted to eat a small amount of bread. The All-night Vigil begins with Great Compline in which the triumphant hymn of Isaiah is chanted, "God is with us, understand, O ye nations and submit yourselves, for God is with us!" The frequent repetition of "God is with us!" expresses the spiritual joy of the faithful who recognize the presence of God-Emmanuel among them. The content of the remainder of the service can be expressed by the initial irmos from the Matins Canon, "Christ is born, give ye glory; Christ from Heaven, meet ye Him; Christ is on the earth be ye exalted. Sing unto the Lord all the earth, and in gladness sing praises, O people, for He is glorified."

*Fr. Seraphim Slobodskoy, "The Law of God"*

LET me begin my discourse to you with that which is written in the book of Psalms, "Come let us praise the Lord, and sing unto God our Saviour:" for He is the Head of our feast-day, and therefore let us tell His noble doings, and relate the manner of that beautifully contrived dispensation, by means of which He has saved the world, and having placed on each one of us the yoke of His kingdom, is justly the object of our admiration. The blessed David therefore says in the Psalms, "All ye people clap your hands;" and again adds thereto, "Sing with understanding, God hath set a king over all the heathen." For this holy mystery was wrought with a wisdom most befitting Christ, if it be true, as true most certainly it is, that the Lord, though He is God, appeared unto us, and though He is in the form of God the Father, and possesses an incomparable and universal preeminence, took the likeness of a slave. But even so He was God and Lord; for He did not cease to be that which He had been.

The company of the holy prophets had before proclaimed both His birth in the flesh, and His assumption of our likeness as about in due time to come to pass: and inasmuch as this hope had now reached its fulfilment, the rational powers of heaven bring the glad tidings of His manifestation and appearance in this world, to shepherds first of all at Bethlehem, who were thus the earliest to receive the knowledge of the mystery. And the type answers to the truth: for Christ reveals Himself to the spiritual shepherds, that they may preach Him to the rest, just as the shepherds also then were taught His mystery by the holy angels, and ran to bear the glad tidings to their fellows. Angels therefore are the first to preach Him, and declare His glory as God born in the flesh in a wonderful manner of a woman.

But perchance some one may object to this; "that He Who was now born was still a child, and wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger: how then did the powers above praise Him as God?" Against such our argument stands firm. Understand, O man, the depth of the mystery! God was in visible form like unto us: the Lord of all in the likeness of a slave, albeit the glory of lordship is inseparable from Him. Understand that the Only-begotten was made flesh; that He endured to be born of a woman for our sakes, to put away the curse pronounced upon the first woman: for to her it was said, "In pains shalt thou bring forth children:" for it was as bringing forth unto death, that they endured the sting of death. But because a woman has brought forth in the flesh the Immanuel, Who is Life, the power of the curse is loosed, and along with death have ceased also the pains that earthly mothers had to endure in bringing forth.

Wouldst thou learn also another reason of the matter? Remember what the very wise Paul has written of Him. "For as to the powerlessness of the law, wherein it was weak through the flesh, God having sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and because of sin, has condemned the sin in His flesh, that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." What then is the meaning of his saying that the Son was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh?" It is this. The law of sin lies hidden in our fleshly members, together with the shameful stirring of the natural lusts: but when the Word of God became flesh, that is man, and assumed our likeness, His flesh was holy and perfectly pure; so that He was indeed in the likeness of our flesh, but not according to its standard. For He was entirely free from the stains and emotions natural to our bodies, and from that inclination which leads us to what is not lawful.

When therefore thou seest the child wrapped in swaddling-clothes, stay not thy thought solely upon His birth in the flesh, but mount up to the contemplation of His godlike glory: elevate thy mind aloft: ascend to heaven: so wilt thou behold [Him in the highest exaltation, possessed of transcendent glory; thou wilt see Him "set upon a throne high and lifted up;" thou wilt hear the Seraphim extolling Him in hymns, and saying that heaven and earth are full of His glory. Yea! even upon earth this has come to pass: for the glory of God shone upon the shepherds, and there was a multitude of the heavenly armies telling Christ's glory. And this it was which was proclaimed of old by the voice of Moses, "Rejoice, ye heavens, with Him, and let all the sons of God worship Him."

For very many holy prophets had been born from time to time, but never had any one of them been glorified by the voice of angels: for they were men, and according to the same measure as ourselves, the true servants of God, and bearers of His words. But not so was Christ: for He is God and Lord, and the Sender of the holy prophets, and, as the Psalmist says, "Who in the clouds shall be compared unto the Lord, and who shall be likened unto the Lord among the sons of God?" For the appellation of sonship is bestowed by Him as of grace upon us who lie under the yoke, and are by nature slaves: but Christ is the true Son, that is, He is the Son of God the Father by nature, even when He had become flesh: for He continued, as I have said, to be that which He had ever been, though He took upon Him that which He had not been.

And that what I say is true, the prophet Isaiah again assures us, saying, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel; butter and honey shall He eat: before He knoweth or chooseth the evil, He shall prefer the good: for before the Child distinguisheth good or evil, He is not obedient to evil in that He chooseth the good." And yet how is it not plain to all, that a new-born babe, as yet unable, from its youth and tenderness, to understand anything, is unequal to the task of distinguishing between good and evil? For he knows absolutely nothing. But in our Saviour Christ it was a great and extraordinary miracle: for He ate while yet a babe both butter and honey. And because He was God, ineffably made flesh, He knew only the good, and was exempt from that depravity which belongs to man. And this too is an attribute of the supreme Substance; for that which is good by nature, firmly and unchangeably, belongs specially to It, and It only; "for there is none good, but one God," as the Saviour has Himself said.

Wouldst thou see another virtue of the Child? Wouldst thou see that He is by nature God, Who in the flesh was of woman? Learn what the prophet Isaiah says of Him: "And I drew near unto the prophetess, and she conceived, and bare a male; and the Lord said unto me, Call His name, Quick take captive, and spoil hastily. For before the Child shall know to call father or mother, He shall take the strength of Damascus." For contemporaneously with the birth of Christ the power of the devil was spoiled. For in Damascus he had been the object of religious service, and had had there very many worshippers; but when the holy Virgin brought forth, the power of his tyranny was broken; for the heathen were won unto the knowledge of the truth; and their firstfruits and leaders were the Magi, who came from the East to Jerusalem; whose teacher was the heaven, and their schoolmaster a star.

Look not therefore upon Him Who was laid in the manger as a babe merely, but in our poverty see Him Who as God is rich, and in the measure of our humanity Him Who excels the inhabitants of heaven, and Who therefore is glorified even by the holy angels. And how noble was the hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and among men good will!" For the angels and archangels, thrones and lordships, and high above them the Seraphim, preserving their settled order, are at peace with God: for never in any way do they transgress His good pleasure, but are firmly established in righteousness and holiness. But we, wretched beings, by having set up our own lusts in opposition to the will of our Lord, had put ourselves into the position of enemies unto Him. But by Christ this has been done away: for He is our peace; for He has united us by Himself unto God the Father, having taken away from the middle the cause of the enmity, even sin, and so justifies us by faith, and makes us holy and without blame, and calls near unto Him those who were afar off: and besides this, He has created the two people into one new man, so making peace, and reconciling both in one body to the Father. For it pleased God the Father to form into one new whole all things in Him, and to bind together things below and things above, and to make those in heaven and those on earth into one flock. Christ therefore has been made for us both Peace and Goodwill; by Whom and with Whom to God the Father be glory and honour and might with the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever, Amen.

*St. Cyril Of Alexandria. Sermon II, Luke 2:8-18*

**25 December / 7 January — The Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ — Fast-free period** — 'And when the fullness of time was come, God sent His only-begotten Son' (Gal. 4:4), to save the human race. And when the ninth month had come after the archangel Gabriel appeared to the most holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured... thou shalt conceive and bear a son'—at that time a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus that all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire be taxed. In accordance with this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and there be inscribed. Therefore righteous Joseph came with the most holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal House of David. But, there being a great many people in that small city for the census, Joseph and Mary could not find a lodging in any house, and found shelter in a cave which the shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave the most holy Virgin gave birth to the Saviour of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bearing Him without pain, as He was conceived without sin of the Holy Spirit and not of



man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling bands, worshipped Him as God and laid Him in a manger. Then righteous Joseph drew near and worshipped Him as the divine Fruit of a virgin womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshipped Him as Messiah and Saviour. The shepherds had heard a multitude of angels singing: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men' (Luke 2:14). At that time there also came wise men from the East, led by a wonderful star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh, and worshipped Him as King of kings, offering Him their gifts (Matt. 2:11). Thus He came into the world Whose coming had been foretold by the prophets and Who was born in the way that they had prophesied: of the most holy Virgin, in the city of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no longer in Jerusalem a king of the tribe of Judah, but Herod the stranger was on the throne. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind that could not be performed by His servants. May His be eternal glory and praise! Amen

What do the wise men learn from the star? ...That He was King of the Jews? And yet He was not king of this kingdom, even as He also said to Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world' ...And even if they knew Him to be a king, for what intent did they come? ...What had astrology to do with Him? ...What reason induced them to worship one who was king so far off ...not yet grown to manhood? Why do they set forth on so long a journey and offer gifts and this when dangers were sure to beset their whole proceedings? ...God called them by the things that are familiar ...and He shows a large and extraordinary star, so as to astonish them ...Yet for all that, God, for the salvation of those who are in error, endured to be served by these things whereby those without were used to serve devils (astrology); only He slightly altered them; that He might draw them off by degrees from their customs, and lead them towards the higher wisdom.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily VI on Matthew 2, 1,4. B#54,pp. 36,37,*

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshipped by shepherds and wise men from the East-the simplest and the wisest of this world. In our day also, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Twisted simplicity and crazed wisdom have always been enemies of Christ's divinity and of His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the East? This question was closely investigated by St Dimitri of Rostov. He asserts that they were kings of small regions or groups of towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt At the same time, they were greatly learned in astrology. The wonderful star that heralded the birth of the new King appeared to them. According to St Dimitri, this star appeared nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus; that is, at the time when the most holy Mother of God conceived Him. They spent these nine months in studying this star, in preparing for the journey and in travelling. They arrived in Bethlehem very shortly after the birth of the Saviour of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, withered, with long white hair and beard. He brought the Lord the gift of gold. The second man was called Caspar; ruddy of face, young and beardless. He brought the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthazar; black-skinned and heavily bearded. He brought the Lord the gift of myrrh. After their deaths, their bodies were taken to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Milan and from Milan to Cologne. It can be added that these three wise men represented the three chief races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented Japheth, the Arabian Shem and the Egyptian Ham. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshipped our incarnate Lord and God!

*The Prologue, Vol. 4, p. 370*

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God (I John 3:1), that we have been saved from sin (Matt. 1:21) and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the world which lies in evil (I John 5: 19). What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honour the fact that we are born of God; and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God and blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed. 'Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god' (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

*St. John of Kronstadt,. My Life in Christ. B#61.*

Tropar of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 4): Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined upon the world the light of knowledge; for thereby, they that worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Kondak of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 3): Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. Angels with shepherds give glory; with a star the Magi do journey; for our sake a young Child is born, Who is pre-eternal God.

**26 December / 8 January— Second Day of the Feast of the Nativity - Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos** - On the second day of Christmas, the Christian Church gives glory and praise to the most holy Mother of God, who bore our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This feast is called a 'general commemoration' because, on this day, all the faithful come together to glorify her, the Mother of God, and to celebrate a triumphant, common feast in her honour. In Ochrid, it has been the custom from time immemorial that, on the eve of the second day of Christmas, Vespers has been celebrated only in the church of the Mother of God, the Chieftain. All the clergy and people there together glorify the most pure Mother of God - Fast-free period - Commemoration of the Flight into Egypt- The wise men, astrologers, from the East, having worshipped the Lord in Bethlehem, returned home, at the command of an angel, another way. Herod, that wicked King, planned to slaughter all the children in Bethlehem, but God saw Herod's intention and sent His angel to Joseph. The angel of God spoke to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did this. Taking the divine Child and His most pure Mother, he travelled first to Nazareth (Lk. 2:39), where he set his household affairs in order and then, taking his son James with them, went off to Egypt (Matt. 2:14). And so the words of the prophet: 'The Lord, riding upon a swift cloud, shall come into Egypt' (Is. 19:1), were fulfilled. In old Cairo today the cave where the holy family lived can be seen, and in the village of Matarea near Cairo, the tree under which the Mother of God rested with the Lord Jesus, where a miraculous spring of water sprang up under the tree. They lived in Egypt for several years, and then the holy family returned to Palestine in response to a command by an angel of God. And so a second prophecy was fulfilled: 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' (Hosea 11:1). Herod was dead, and on his bloodstained throne sat a worthy successor in his wicked son Archelaus. Joseph, hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Jerusalem, returned to Galilee, to his town of Nazareth, where he settled in his own home. Galilee was at that time ruled by another of Herod's sons, Herod the Younger, who was somewhat better than his wicked brother, Archelaus.

**St. Tathai (Athanasius)** - nephew of Saint Samson of Dol. Hermit in Glamorgan, Wales. Founded the monastery at Llantathan (Saint Athanasius), Gwent. Founded the monastery school at Caerwent. Reputed miracle worker, he was noted for gentleness, love of the country, and for his generosity to travellers and the poor. Born in 5th century, Irish. Died in 6th century at Caerwent or Llantathan, Wales of natural causes.

Tropar of St. Tathai Tone 8: Teacher of true piety and blessed adornment of Christ's Church, O Father Tathai:/ as thou didst serve Wales with thy tireless endeavours,/ teach us, O Saint, the virtues of unshakable stability and loyalty to the true Faith,/ that at the end Christ our God will grant great mercy to our souls.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Hieromartyr Euthymius, bishop of Sardis (c.840); St. Archelaus, bishop of Harran (c.280); St. Zeno, bishop of Maiuma (4th C); Venerable Evaristus of Studion (825); Venerable Constantine of Synnada (9th C); Venerable Nicodemus of Tismana (1406); Hieromartyr Constantius the Russian (1743); New Hieromartyrs Alexander Volkov and Demetrius Chistoserdov, priests (1918); New Hieromartyrs Michael Cheltsov, Nicholas Zalessky, Nicholas Tarbeyev, priests, and Michael Smirnov, deacon (1930); New Hieromartyrs Leonidas, bishop of Mariisk, Alexander Krylov, priest, Monk-martyr Basil (Mazurenko) (1937); New Hieromartyr Gregory Serbarinov, priest, Monk-martyr Isaac II (Bobrikov) of Optina, Nun-martyrs Augusta (Zashchuk), Maria (Laktionov), and Martyr Agrippina (1938); 'Mt. Kykkos, Cyprus' and 'Help in Giving Birth' Icons of the Mother of God.

**27 December / 9 January — Third Day of the Feast of the Nativity - Fast-free period -St Stephen, Protomartyr and Archdeacon** - He was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in a Hellenic milieu. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons whom the holy apostles ordained for the service of the poor in Jerusalem. This is why he is called the Archdeacon—the first, or chief, of them. By the power of his faith, Stephen worked many wonders among the people. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but were always confounded by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit who acted through him. Then the shameful Jews, adept at calumny and slander, stirred up the people and leaders against this innocent man. They slandered Stephen, saying that he had blasphemed against God and against Moses, and quickly found false witnesses who supported their assertion. Then Stephen stood before the people, and all saw his face 'like the face of an angel': that is, his face was illumined by the light of grace as was the face of Moses when he talked with God. Stephen opened his mouth and spoke of God's manifold works and marvels, performed in the past for the People of Israel, and of the people's manifold transgressions and opposition to God. He especially denounced them for the slaying of Christ the Lord, calling them 'betrayers and murderers' (Acts 7:52). While they ground their teeth, Stephen looked and saw the heavens open and the glory of God, and spoke to the Jews of what he saw: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God' (7:56). Then the malicious men took him out of the city and stoned him to death. Among his murderers was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the most holy Mother of God was standing on a rock at a distance with St John the Theologian, and witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed for Stephen. This happened exactly a year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. St Stephen's body was taken secretly and buried by Gamaliel in his own ground.



He was a Jewish prince and a secret Christian. Thus this first of Christ's martyrs made a glorious end and entered into the Kingdom of Christ our God.

**Also commemorated on this day:** St. Maximus, bishop of Alexandria (282); St. Theodore, archbishop of Constantinople (686); Venerable Theodore the Branded, brother of St. Theophanes the hymnographer (840); Venerable Luke of Triglia (10th C); Finding of the relics of Venerable Therapont of Belozersk (1514); St. Barlaam, archbishop of Tobolsk (1802); Venerable Boniface of Kiev (1871); New Hieromartyr Tikhon, archbishop of Voronezh and 160 priests killed with him (1919); New Martyr Antonina Bryanskikh (1937).

**28 December / 10 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 20,000 Holy Martyrs of Nicomedia** - In the time of the wicked Emperor Maximian Hercules, the Christian faith flourished in Nicomedia, and spread from day to day. At one time the Emperor, staying in the city, came to know of the large number of Christians, and he was greatly enraged and devised a means of slaughtering them all. The feast of the Nativity of Christ was approaching, and the Emperor, discovering that all the Christians gathered in the church on this feast, ordered that, on that day, the church be surrounded by soldiers and set alight. When all the Christians were assembled in the church after midnight and the glorious celebration was beginning, the soldiers surrounded the church so that no-one could leave, and the Emperor's envoy went into the church and told the Christians of the Emperor's command that they either immediately offer sacrifice to idols or all be burned to death. Then the archdeacon, a courageous soldier of Christ, aflame with divine zeal, began to encourage the people, reminding them of the Three Holy Children in the furnace in Babylon. 'Look, my brethren,' he said, 'at the table of sacrifice in the Lord's altar, and understand that our true Lord and God will now sacrifice on this; so shall we not lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?' The people were fired with enthusiasm to die for Christ, and all the catechumens were baptised and chrismated. The soldiers then set fire to the church on all sides and the Christians, twenty thousand of them, were burned in the flame singing the glory of God. The church burned for five days, and a smoke with a fragrant and intoxicating smell rose from it, and a marvellous golden light was seen around it. Thus these many men, women and children died gloriously and received wreaths of eternal glory in the Kingdom of Christ. They suffered and were glorified in the year 302.

**Saint Maughold:** Died c. 488. Said to have been a brigand or pirate, who was converted to the Faith by Saint Patrick, who sent him as bishop to the Isle of Man as expiation for his sins. Maughold is traditionally honoured as the Apostle of the Isle of Man.

**Saints Romulus & Conindrus:** Died c. 450. Romulus and Conindrus were among the first preachers of the Good News on the Isle of Man. They were contemporaries of Saint Patrick.

Tropar of Ss Romulus and Conindrus Tone 4: By your holy preaching, Romulus and Conindrus,/ the Holy Name of Jesus was first heard in the Isle of Man./ As Heaven rejoices at the extension of the Orthodox Faith,/ pray, most holy fathers, that we may use our lives in Christ's service/ for the salvation of our souls.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Apostle of the Seventy Nicanor the deacon (34); Venerable Babylas of Tarsus (7th C); Venerable Simon the Myrrh-Gusher of Bulgaria (1287); Venerable Ignatius of Loma, Yaroslavl (1591); Venerable Cornelius of Krypetsky (1903); New Hieromartyrs Nicodemus, bishop of Belgorod, and Arcadius Reshetnikov, deacon (1918); New Hieromartyr Alexander Dagayev, priest (1920); New Hieromartyrs Leonid Viktorov, Nicholas Rodionov, and Theoctistus Khomerskov, priests (1937); New Hieromartyrs Arethus Nasonov, and Alexander Ciceronov, priests (1938)

**29 December / 11 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 14,000 Holy Children in Bethlehem** - When the wise men from the East failed to return to Jerusalem from Bethlehem to tell Herod about the new-born king, but, at the angel's command, returned to their home another way, Herod was as furious as a wild beast, and commanded that all the children of two years and under in Bethlehem and its surroundings be killed. This terrible command of the king's was carried out to the letter. His soldiers cut off some of the children's heads with their swords, dashed others on the stones, trampled some of them underfoot and drowned others with their own hands. The weeping and lamentation of their mothers rose to heaven: 'Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children' as had been prophesied (Jer. 13:15; Matt. 2:18). This evildoing towards the hordes of innocent children came to pass a year after the birth of Christ, at a time when Herod was trying to find the divine Child. He sought Zacharias's son, John, meaning to kill him in the belief that John was the new king. When Zacharias refused to hand John over, he was killed in the Temple on Herod's orders. St Simeon the Host of God was also killed, and went to God soon after the Presentation in the Temple. Slaying the children in Bethlehem, Herod then turned on the Jewish elders, who had revealed to him where the Messiah would be born. He killed Hyrcanes the High Priest, and seventy elders from the Sanhedrin, and

thus they who conspired with Herod to kill the new baby King came to an evil end. After that, Herod killed his own brother and sister and wife, and three of his sons. Finally, God's punishment fell on him: he began to tremble, his legs swelled, the lower part of his body became putrid and worms came out of the sores, his nose became blocked and an unbearable stench spread around from it. At the time of his death, he remembered that there were many captive Jews in prison, so, that they should not rejoice at his death, he ordered that they all be slaughtered. Thus this terrible ruler lost his inhuman soul and was given to the devil for eternity.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Holy Prophet Nathan (10<sup>th</sup> BC); St. Trophimus, bishop of Arles (3rd C); Venerable Benjamin of Nitria (392); Venerable Athenodorus, disciple of Pachomius the Great (4th C); Venerable Marcellus, abbot of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones (485); Venerable Ebrulf of Pays d'Ouche (596); Venerable Thaddeus of Studion (818); St. George, bishop of Nicomedia (9th C); Venerable Mark, Theophilus, and John of the Kiev Caves (11th-12th C); Venerable Theophilus of Omutch (c.1412); Venerable Job of Tismiansk (1621); Venerable Basiliscus of Siberia (1824); New Hieromartyr Theodosius Belenky, priest (1938); New Martyrs Agrippina Kiselyova, Anna Borovskaya, Anna Popov, Barbara Derevyagina, Eudocia Nazina, Ephrosyne Denisova, Matrona Navolokina, Natalia Vasilyevna, Natalia Siluyanova, and Natalia Sundukova (1942); Venerable Laurence of Chernigov (1952); Venerable Libanius of Egypt.

### ‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

**Monday** - Hebrews 1:1-2 Royal Hours - 1st Hour; Matthew 1:18-25 Royal Hours - 1st Hour; Galatians 3:23-29 Royal Hours - 3rd Hour; Luke 2:1-20 Royal Hours - 3rd Hour; Hebrews 1:10-2:3 Royal Hours - 6th Hour; Matthew 2:1-12 Royal Hours - 6th Hour; Hebrews 2:11-18 Royal Hours - 9th Hour; Matthew 2:13-23 Royal Hours - 9th Hour; Hebrews 1:1-12 Liturgy; Luke 2:1-20 Liturgy

**Tuesday** - Matthew 1:18-25; Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-12

**Wednesday** - Hebrews 2:11-18 (Theotokos); Matthew 2:13-23 (Theotokos)

**Thursday** - Hebrews 7:1-6; Mark 11:27-33; Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60 (Saint); Matthew 21:33-42 (Saint)

**Friday** - Hebrews 7:18-25; Mark 12:1-12; Romans 8:3-9 (Martyrs); Luke 10:19-21 (Martyrs)

**Saturday** - Ephesians 2:11-13; Luke 17:3-10; 2 Corinthians 5:15-21 (Martyrs); Matthew 2:13-23 (Martyrs); 1 Timothy 6:11-16 (Saturday After the Nativity); Matthew 12:15-21 (Saturday After the Nativity)

### HYMN OF PRAISE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Out of burning love, Thou didst come down from heaven;  
From eternal beauty, Thou didst descend into monstrous pain;  
From eternal light, Thou didst descend into the thick darkness of evil.  
Thou didst extend Thy holy hand to those choked in sin.  
Heaven was amazed, the earth quaked.  
Welcome, O Christ! O ye peoples, rejoice!  
Out of burning love, by which Thou didst create the world,  
As a slave Thou didst debase Thyself to loose the enslaved,  
To restore the house that Adam destroyed,  
To enlighten the darkened, to unloose sinners.  
Love that knows not fear or humiliation-  
Welcome, O Christ! The Master of Salvation!  
Out of burning love, O King of all beauty,  
Thou didst leave the radiance of the beautiful Cherubim,  
Thou didst descend into the cave of human life,  
To despairing men, with a torch and peace.  
How to contain Thee?-The earth became frightened.  
Welcome, O Christ! Heaven bears Thee up!  
The most beautiful Virgin for a long time hoped in Thee.  
The earth raises her to Thee, that through her Thou wilt descend  
From the lofty throne, from the heavenly city,  
To bring health, to release man from sin.  
O Holy Virgin, Golden Censer-  
To thee be glory and praise, O Mother full of grace!

## **REFLECTION**

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshiped by shepherds and wise men (astrologers) from the east-the simplest and the wisest of this world. Even today, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Savior are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Perverted simplicity and half-learned wisdom were always the enemies of Christ's divinity and His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the east? This question was especially studied by St. Dimitri of Rostov. He claims that they were kings of certain smaller regions or individual towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. At the same time, they were erudite in the knowledge of astronomy. This wondrous star appeared to them, which announced the birth of the New King. According to St. Dimitri, this star appeared to them nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus, i.e., at the time of His conception by the Most-holy Theotokos. They spent nine months in studying this star, in preparing for the journey and in traveling. They arrived in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of the Savior of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, with long white hair and beard. He offered the Lord the gift of gold. The second was called Caspar, of ruddy face, young and beardless. He offered the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthasar, of dark complexion and a very heavy beard. He offered the Lord the gift of myrrh. After their deaths, their bodies were taken to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Milan, and from Milan to Cologne. It can be added that these three wise men were representatives of the three main races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented the Japhethites, the Arabian represented the Semites, and the Egyptian represented the Hamites. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshiped the Incarnate Lord and God.

## **CONTEMPLATION**

Contemplate the beauty of the soul of the Most-holy Theotokos:

1. How her soul was radiant and immaculate;
2. How her soul was filled with peace from faith and hope in God;
3. How her soul was filled with the sweet-smelling fragrance of prayer.

## **HOMILY**

**-on the birth of the Lord, the Son of God-**

**I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world (John 16:28).**

The only-begotten Son of God, brethren, begotten in eternity of the Father without a mother, was born in time of a mother without a father. That first begetting is an unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity in eternity, and the second is the unfathomable mystery of God's power and love for mankind in time. The greatest mystery in time corresponds to the greatest mystery in eternity. Without entering into this greatest mystery with the small taper of our understanding, let us be content, brethren, with the knowledge that our salvation had its origin not from man or from earth, but from the greatest heights of the divine invisible world. So great is God's mercy, and so great is the dignity of man, that the Son of God Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherd's cave, solely to save mankind, to cleanse men from sin and to return them to Paradise. I came forth from the Father, where I had everything, and am come into the world, which cannot give Me anything. The Lord was born in a cave to show that the whole world is one dark cave, which He alone can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem-and Bethlehem means ``the House of Bread''-to show that He is the only Bread of Life worthy of true men.

O Lord Jesus, the Pre-eternal Son of the Living God and the Son of the Virgin Mary, enlighten us and nourish us with Thyself.

**To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.**