

29th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday of the Holy Fathers, Forefeast of Nativity & Sunday Before Nativity

19 December / 1 January

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 4: When the women disciples of the Lord / learned from the Angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection / they cast away the ancestral curse / and elatedly told the Apostles / death is overcome / Christ God is risen / granting 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 4: My Saviour and Redeemer / as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains / He has shattered the gates of hell, / and as Master, / He has risen on the third day.

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 wilt, Thou canst do!



Vespers: Gen. 14:14-20; Deut. 1:8-11, 15-17; Deut. 10:14-21

Matins Gospel VII

Epistle: 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. 1, 2. B#58, pp. 477-478

Gospel: 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...."

Asking for God's Gifts: On the Sunday Before Nativity

We do not have sufficient patience and faith – that about which the Holy Apostle today spoke. Sometimes we cannot even wait three days. But our sensuality and God's gift are not compatible. Either we need to cool down in our feelings and passions and accept the gift of God with reverence and quietude, or else by our emotionality we will not see even the greatest of His gifts.

In the Church Calendar today has a special name: the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ. What importance does the Church see in this day, which prepares us for the encounter with the bright feast of the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Savior? Today at the Liturgy we heard the Gospel reading that reminds us of those many dozens of human generations that heard the word about the coming Messiah and awaited His coming. They awaited, but did not see Him. One generation succeeded another, followed by a third and a fourth: thought of the Savior lived in the people, being handed down by word of mouth. But dozens of generations had already passed, and the Messiah had not yet come. What did the People of God do? Did they despair? Did they murmur? Did they grow angry? It continued to wait in hope and trust. Faith was not extinguished among the people, no matter what the circumstances of life: rising and falling, abundance and hunger, joy and sorrow – all this was encountered in life. But nothing could shake the faith by which the people lived.

The coming into the world of our Lord Jesus Christ fulfills this faith. At today's Divine Liturgy, the Gospel according to Matthew was read, in which the Holy Apostle, referring primarily to the Jewish people, lists all the ancestors of the Lord and Savior according to the flesh. This listing forces us to think about the fact that the Lord's Nativity was possible only because these generations kept faith in God and fidelity to the Lord.

But now let us look back on our own lives. We, too, are awaiting the fulfillment of our hopes and requests that we address to the Lord. We come to church to ask for our neighbors and for ourselves in our deeds, we light candles, give alms, ask others for prayers, and pray for ourselves. One service goes by, then another and another – and nothing changes. And what happens to us? The following happens: our faith weakens and our soul is visited by doubt, with which we do not fight. One begins not to seek trust and support in God, but in something completely different. At best, this can mean turning to good and decent people. But at worst it can mean turning to dark powers, psychics, witches, and sorcerers. And sometimes, having lost all hope, it means falling into despair, turning away from life, and abusing drugs and alcohol. One can imagine that if it had not been for the faith of the people of Israel, it would have ceased to exist as a nation, and the Lord's coming would not have occurred.

But that people did not see Christ – it did not know or hear Him. But we today chanted at the Liturgy: "We have seen the True Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, in worshipping the undivided Trinity, for He has saved us." We live not in hope and faith, nor in fulfillment, neither in expectation of the Savior's coming, but in His coming, in the fulfillment of His grace-filled power and His presence in our lives.

Should we despair and lose heart at not receiving what we have asked for? But why have we not gotten it? Because the gift of God, which is given to the people, must be valued by this people. Everything that is given without labor dissipates and dies, if man is incapable of preserving and multiplying it. So it is with God's gift that we seek from the Lord: man must value it. And it is valued only when man is prepared to accept and preserve this gift. Therefore the Church says: do not leave off your prayers; God will grant you everything you have asked for in a time that befits your salvation. God does not give us what we ask for because He is sorry, but because it would not be saving for us, for God's gift should be not only worthily received and valued but, like every gift, it should not overshadow one's eyes by means of one's own success. Therefore God gives us things when our passions and feelings weaken. He gives at times when the gift will be valued, sought, and increased in every person.

We do not have sufficient patience and faith – that about which the Holy Apostle today spoke. Sometimes we cannot even wait three days. But our sensuality and God's gift are not compatible. Either we need to cool down in our feelings and passions and accept the gift of God with reverence and quietude, or else by our emotionality we will not see even the greatest of His gifts.

Today's Sunday in the remembrance of the Holy Fathers who from generation to generation believed that the Lord would come into the world to save it. May this example strengthen us in our Christian life, in our spiritual weakness, which we sometimes cannot cure in ourselves. May this ecclesial remembrance strengthen us in our faith, and let us not weaken in our prayers, but be unrelenting before the Lord. And then the Lord will grant each of us and our Fatherland for our fidelity, devotion, and patience, that great gift that we call the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I greet all of you, my dears, with the coming Feast of the Nativity of Christ. May God grant you all strength, fulfillment of faith, and hope. Amen.

METROPOLITAN MERKURY OF ROSTOV AND NOVOCHERKASSK

Saints of the week

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; St Boniface the Merciful, Bishop of Ferentino; Our Holy Father Elias of Murom; St. Manirus, b, apostle of Nth. Scotland; St. Winebald the Pilgrim, abbot and missionary of England and Heidenheim, Germany (761).

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. St Danilo, Archbishop of Serbia.

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; The Holy Martyr Themistocles; In England near Oxford at the village of Bampton, St. Berenwald, priest, m. and at Shaftesbury, St. Elgiva, queen, nun.

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 claved 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; In Wales, St. Amaethlu, founder of Llanfaethlu in Anglesey.

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; Our Holy Father Nahum, the Wonderworker of Ochrid; At Hexham, St. Frithbert, b. At Abernethy. St. Mazota, virgin

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. Our Holy Father Nicolas the Soldier; In E. Scotland, St. Caranus, bishop.



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

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.

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 travelling. 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 Gaspar, 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.