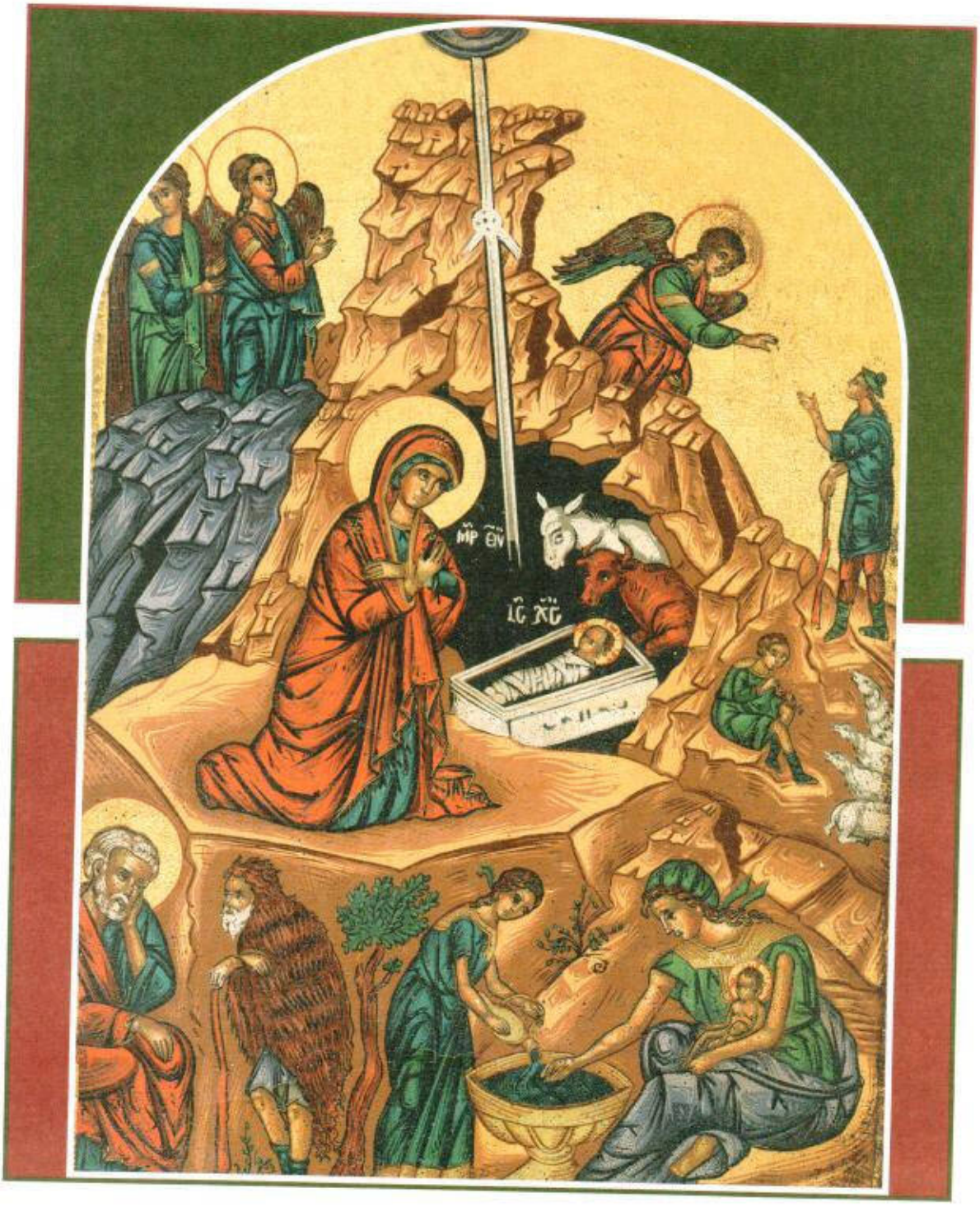
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Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD **FREEHOLD, NJ 07728**

Nativity in the flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ **December 25, 2014**

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; **Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158**
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.
We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.
We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.
We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.
We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.
We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ We conclude our celebration today with festival anointing. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Born!" to which we respond, "Glorify Him!"

+++ We pray all are generous as the Wise Men in honoring the new-born Saviour of the world with ar generous stewardship offering.

+++ **We encourage our faithful to remember in prayer to light candles for loved ones, especially parents and family members who have gone to their eternal reward along with those whose presence we are blessed to enjoy.**

+++ **In our exuberant joy over the Nativity of our Lord, there is no fasting until the Feast of Theophany, January 6.**

+++ **The next Pirohi Sale will be Saturday, January 17.**

+++ **Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.**

+++ **Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Father George, Anna, Barbara, Betty, James, Yevlogia, Nicholas, Maria, Cynthia, Nicholas, Pani Anna Marie and Andrea.**

+++ **The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.**

+++ **We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, $378.00; Candles, $23.00; Food Coupons, $160.00; Kitchen, $4018.00; Pennies From Heaven, $1.00, for a total of $4018.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!**

+++ **As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Maria Idronmenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Bob Gorbich, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.**

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **$1819.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in $20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized $5750 on this project to date!

+++ **The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

The Nativity

A scene so peaceful in the night,
The starry sky is soft and bright,
A stream of light shines from a Star,
To guide the Wise Men from afar.
A stable's where the Christ Child lay,
Asleep so precious on the hay.
Mary and Joseph are close by,
With angels singing from on high.
The shepherds kneel down to adore
The Babe Who comes to bless the poor.
A King has gold to give this day,
A drummer boy, a song to play.
As God's Own Son has come to earth,
May we behold His wondrous birth!

Babies and Bethlehem

It is not easily understood how the Christ Child was comfortable in swaddling clothes. Two thousand years ago, how did any infant thrive in such restrictive wrappings?

On the other hand, Mary and Joseph would undoubtedly have puzzled over zippered blanket sleepers and tape-on Kimbies. The layettes fit the times and are really of no consequence. The important thought to remember regarding the Baby in a manger and babies in plastic carriers is LOVE.

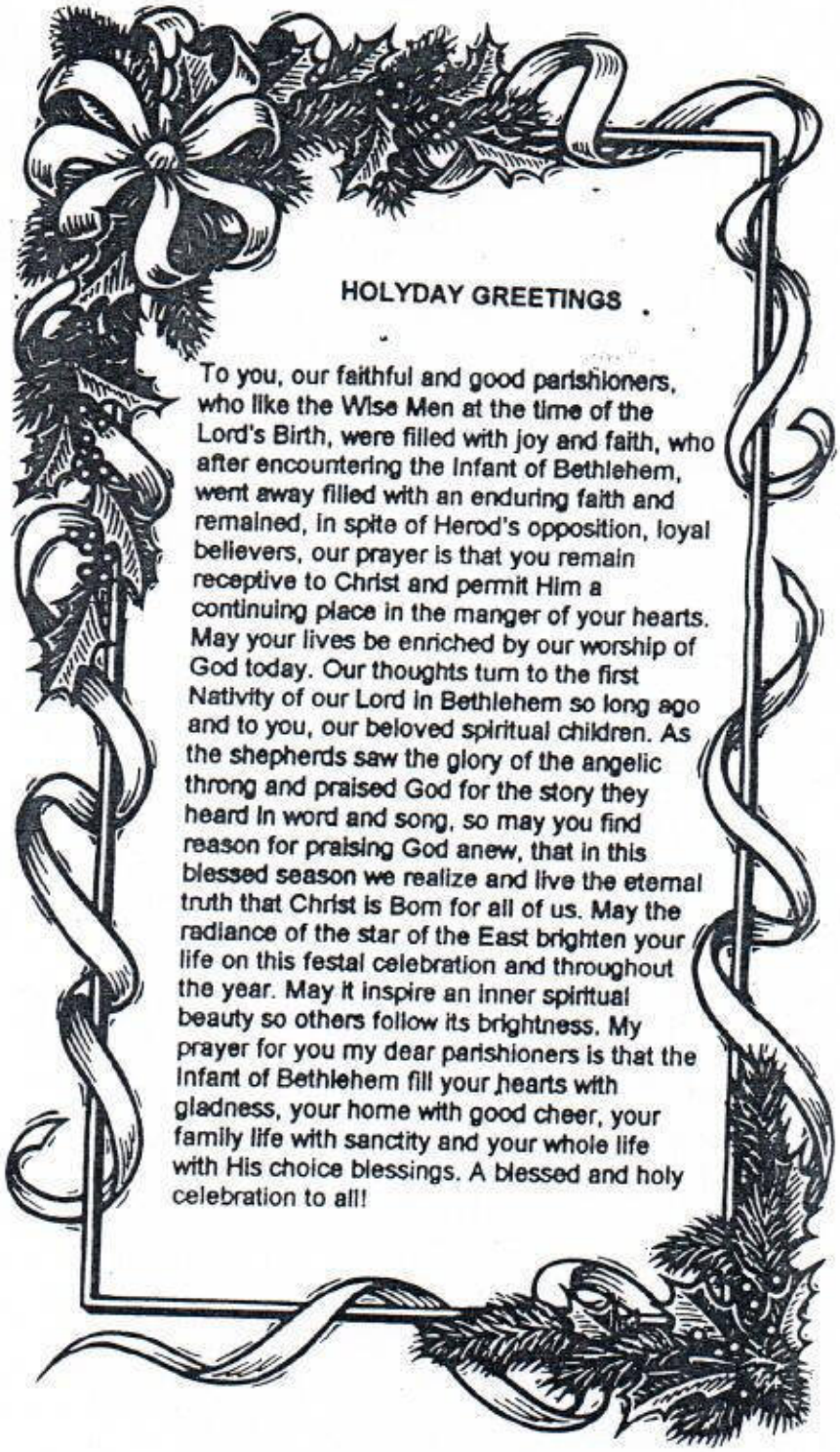
During those first Bethlehem nights, surely St. Joseph walked the straw-littered earth floor, strong fingers gently supporting the tiny dark head of Jesus. There is no sensation comparable to the slight nodding of a new baby's head against one's cheek; no sweeter fragrance, no more unforgettable memory. Even years later, all of the innocence, all of the helplessness, floods through one's heart, when holding another new life.

One can compare the humanity of the Babe of Bethlehem with any other baby on earth. One cannot compare His Divinity for Mary's Son came to redeem all other babies on earth.

Cruelty of cruelties and a sin crying out to Heaven for vengeance is that which denies a child his right to be; his right to breathe and to love God and His creation and to be loved in return.

Charles Dickens, the second of eight children and the father of a dozen expressed it memorably when he wrote:

"I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us." ■



HOLYDAY GREETINGS

To you, our faithful and good parishioners, who like the Wise Men at the time of the Lord's Birth, were filled with joy and faith, who after encountering the Infant of Bethlehem, went away filled with an enduring faith and remained, in spite of Herod's opposition, loyal believers, our prayer is that you remain receptive to Christ and permit Him a continuing place in the manger of your hearts. May your lives be enriched by our worship of God today. Our thoughts turn to the first Nativity of our Lord in Bethlehem so long ago and to you, our beloved spiritual children. As the shepherds saw the glory of the angelic throng and praised God for the story they heard in word and song, so may you find reason for praising God anew, that in this blessed season we realize and live the eternal truth that Christ is Born for all of us. May the radiance of the star of the East brighten your life on this festal celebration and throughout the year. May it inspire an inner spiritual beauty so others follow its brightness. My prayer for you my dear parishioners is that the Infant of Bethlehem fill your hearts with gladness, your home with good cheer, your family life with sanctity and your whole life with His choice blessings. A blessed and holy celebration to all!

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shed upon the world the light of knowledge; for though it, those who worshipped the stars have learned from a star to worship You, the Sun of Justice, and to recognize You as the Orient from high, Glory be to You, O Lord! Troparion, Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Today, the Virgin gives birth to perfect Essence, and the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible. The angels sing His glory with the shepherds; the wise men journey with the star, for there is born for us an Infant Child, God Eternal Kontakion, Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord.

Rejoice, O Bethlehem, and make ready, O Ephrata! Behold the Virgin is on her way to give birth to the Great Shepherd she carries in her womb. The God-bearing forefathers will rejoice at his sight, and together with the shepherds, they will glorify Him in the arms of the Virgin Kontakion, preparation for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us proclaim the present mystery by which the separation has been broken and the flaming sword withheld: now shall the Cherubim let us all come to the tree of life. As for me, I am returning to the bliss of paradise from where I had been driven by original sin Vesper Hymn, Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Behold, the image of the Father and His immutable Eternity has taken the form of a servant! He has come down to us from a Mother all-pure and yet He has remain unchanged; He has remained true God as He was before, and has taken on Himself what He had not been, becoming Man out of his love for man. Wherefore, let us raise our voices in hymns singing: "O God, born of a Virgin, have mercy on us!" Vesper Hymn, Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Let all the earth worship and sing praise to You, sing praise to Your Name Prokimenon, Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Chanukah ~ The Feast of Dedication

In the second century B.C. the Syrians had gained control of Palestine. With this control came the command that the Jews were to discontinue their religious beliefs and practices. Some Jews did as they were forced to; others refused despite all Syrian threats.

It wasn't long before these Jews revolted, led by an elderly priest named Mattathias. His son, Judah Maccabee, continued the revolt until final victory was won over the Syrian army.

To celebrate their regained freedom, the Jews went to Jerusalem to cleanse the temple and once again begin Jewish worship there. When they searched the temple for oil to use in their services, all they found was a single unopened container of oil. According to tradition, this single container of oil burned before the altar for eight days.

During Chanukah, which usually comes in December, Jews burn eight candles — lighting one the first evening, two the second, and so on. Chanukah is often referred to as the Festival of Lights. It is a time of great rejoicing as well as a solemn reminder of how precious freedom is.

Chanukah, the Feast of Dedication — a most significant event in Judaic history — commemorating a time when their ancestors, led by the Maccabees, fought for their religious freedom.

Why Did God Choose Mary?

1. Because of her pure character. She was a Virgin. "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin..." Luke 1: 26, 27.

2. Because of her humility. "For he looked upon his servant in her lowliness; and all generations to come shall call me blessed" Luke 1: 48.

3. Because of her submission to the will of God. "Mary said, 'I am the servant of the Lord, Let it be done to me as you say'" Luke 1: 38.

4. Because she loved God and His Word. "Even as he promised our fathers, promised Abraham and his descendants forever" Luke 1: 55.

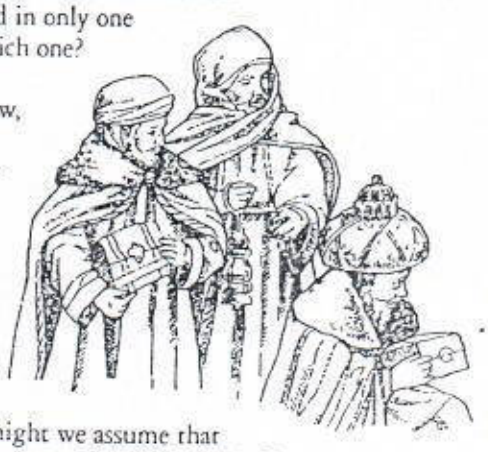
5. Because she was of the royal family of David. "..son of David, son of Jesse...son of Adam, son of God" Luke 3: 31, 38.; "Does not the Scripture say that the Messiah, being of David's family, is to come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived" John 7: 42?

6. Because God would be glorified in His choice. "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit finds joy in God my Saviour" Luke 1: 46, 47.

Bible Quiz

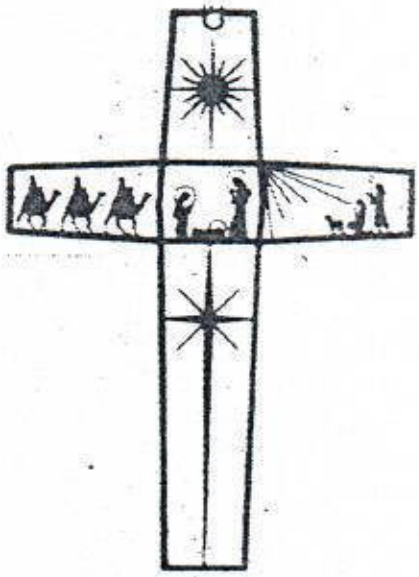
The story of the visit of the wise men is found in only one Gospel. Which one? Is it:

A) Matthew,
B) Mark,
C) Luke or
D) John?



Does the Bible actually record that there were three wise men? If not, why might we assume that there were three seers from the East? Chaprer 2, verse 11 of the Gospel which has the story may provide the answer.

Answers: A; There were three gifts.



Behold, a Virgin shall be with child,
and bear a Son,
and they shall call His name Immanuel,
which is translated, "God with us."
—Matthew 1:23

"...we have seen his star..."

At the top of the holyday Jesse trees most of us fix a star, for in the heavens, high over Bethlehem, there was a star.

The star is an especially important and meaningful symbol of the feast of the Nativity of our Lord. Stars speak of other worlds; their radiance comes from afar and they testify to a realm beyond our earth. The Birth in the flesh of our Lord has just such a message for each of us. Above our busy lives, high over our varied activities and above our doubts and fears, there is the Holy Spirit who presides and counsels, plans and guides.

Long before science gave to man exact ways of measuring celestial distances, for reckoning time, for finding directions on endless deserts and on vast oceans, man looked to the stars and a sense of certainty came into human life.

Stars are constant and dependable, an astronomer can predict with surety their movements, ascertaining what position a particular star maintained a thousand years ago, and foretelling its movements during a thousand years to come. It is good to know that some thing is certain, something is steadfast. Human beings are fickle. Our steps turn at the slightest whim, our plans are altered by the weakest argument. But God, like the stars He created, is eternal and steadfast, the same yesterday, today and forever. Like the stars in his heavens, our God challenges our weakness by his dependability.

The stars are more clearly seen when it is night. When the earth is darkest, they shine with greatest brilliance and appear most clearly to man because of their bright contrast against the dark sky. Just so, when we are overwhelmed by clouds of despondency and when our lives are shrouded in a night of fear, then we see most clearly the light of God's truth and the brightness of his all-comprehending and inclusive love. Could the Almighty have chosen a more suitable or appropriate symbol for his birth in flesh than a star?

The wise men were guided by a star. From their homes they traveled, guided by its light. They did not know the way and when they were not sure of their destination, but they believed the star, for to them the star represented God's guiding hand. On the night of Christ's birth the Bethlehem star was high above the heads of every man. All men could have seen it, but the wise men followed it. In their hearts was a compelling faith that is a prerequisite for all star-led journeys. If we relive our God, He will guide our steps aright. When we trust him, He will make bright the way ahead. He who stands among us still is "...the bright morning star" Revelation 22: 16.

Stars rise and set, that star shines on;
Songs fail, but still that music bears
Though all the ages come and gone,
In lane and field and city streets.
And we who catch the Nativity gleam,
Watching with children on the hill,
We know, we know it is no dream;
He stands among us still!

What They Said And Did

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another..." Luke 2: 15. What did they say, we may ask ourselves. What do we say to one another on the day after the Birth of our Lord? For weeks we anticipate the day of the Nativity of our Lord. We buy gifts, we send cards, we decorate our homes. We sing carols and contribute to special charities and within our hearts is the spirit of good will and cheer. We meditate more intensely on His coming among us and we participate in the welcoming services during the Nativity Fast in our parish churches. It is no doubt, a happy time, a joyful time, a spiritually enriched time, but soon it is all over with – or is it? Suppose the shepherds had said, "Well that was a thrilling experience. The choir from heaven and the words of the angelic visitors stirred our hearts. But let's get back down to earth now; let's return to the important tasks of daily living and supporting our families. There are sheep to watch once again."

Or, as we might now say, "Let's wash the dishes, clean up the house and get back to daily routine and reality. There are bills to be paid and the things that have been neglected during the period of preparation for celebrating his birth in flesh among us."

What a shocking let-down! What an even more shocking reaction to this august holyday!

A theologian once drew an imaginary word picture of one of those shepherds who had been a youth on that night of the Lord's august Nativity and who now became old. His grandson is on his knee as he recalls, "A long longtime ago, when I was little more than a boy, I was out in the Judean hills one night with some other shepherds, keeping watch over the flock. An angel of the Lord came upon us and the glory of the Lord shown round about us. And we were really frightened, scared cold to the bone. But the angel said, "Fear not...for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord...You will find the baby in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" Luke 2: 12.

Then there is silence because the old man's lips cease to move. The grandson looks toward him with anticipation and puzzlement.: "Grandpa, is that all?" "What did you do when you heard the good news? Was what the angels said really true? Was the Saviour really born? The old shepherd shakes his white head and answers, "I never knew, I never went to see. Some say that it is all a myth. Some claim He was the Saviour, but I never bothered to pursue it. I could never be quite sure. I never went to see."

This supreme tragedy of the Birth of the Lord is that its meaning is lost on so many people today, including some of in our midst. Before leaving this manger, because every Orthodox parish church is in fact a manger of the Lord, ask yourself, resolve it for yourself in your own mind and heart. What am I doing there this evening? Will I come again to glorify the God who not only appears to us, but invites us into his presence. Was I at the manger this past Sunday? Was I at the manger every opportunity I had to be here and glorify him? Will I be here this coming Sunday and holy days in the future? Am I only caught up in the holiness of this great feast and then soon enough will be preoccupied with the mundane pursuits of my everyday life, totally oblivious to the coming of the Saviour into the world? Am I playing games with myself and with God?

Meditate with me for a moment on these very old, but profoundly meaningful verses.

On Nativity eve they filled the house, some fifty guests all told.
O Little Lord from heaven, were you left out in the cold?
And ate and sang, played cards and danced til early morning light.
O Little Lord from heaven, did they think of you that night?
Next morning came the presents on a glittering holiday tree.
O Little Lord from heaven, was there any gift for you?

The dinner was a Roman feast, and how those guests did eat!
O Little Lord of from heaven, were you hungry in the street?
Then came some teas, a movie, much to drink and at night the last revue.
O Little Lord from heaven, what had these to do with you?
By midnight all were tired, angry and tumbled into bed.
O Little Lord from heaven, did they think you were dead?
They all woke up with headaches and no joy in work or play.
O Little Lord from heaven did they mark your birth that day?
The love, the joy were good, no doubt, the rest only a pagan spree.
O Little Lord from heaven, let us keep the day with you!

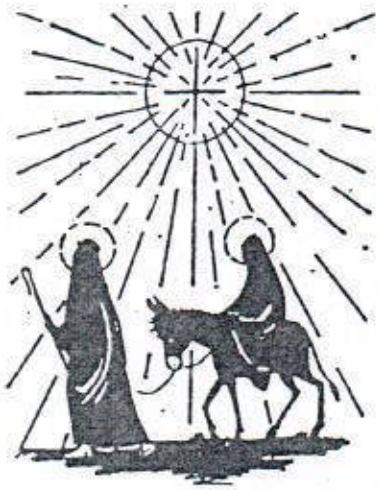
Yes, there are those who know the meaning of this Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, who through the study of His word, who respond to the instruction of His Body, the Church, inspired by his heavenly grace, who through steady, constant worship in his Church have consecrated their whole life to his will, just like the shepherds , they have said, "Let us go to Bethlehem and worship him" Luke 2: 15.

Ephesians 4:7-10 - ***Each of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given. As the Scripture says, "When he went up to the very heights, he took many captives with him; he gave gifts to mankind." Now what does "he went up" mean? It means that first he came down to the lowest depths of the earth. So the one who came down is the same one who went up, above and beyond the heavens, to fill the whole universe with his presence.***

Nativity Prayer

In the Name of the Infant of Bethlehem, we pray, "Almighty and everlasting God, in this Nativity season, we remember that you have chosen to live in us and through us to carry out your eternal purpose. We know you us with the knowledge and gifts necessary for this task. Like our ancestors in faith before us, help us, above all else, to glorify and enjoy your blessings forever. Amen."

An Intrusion



The feast of the Nativity of our Lord is an intrusion. And that is exactly what it was some 2,000 years ago when the sovereign Lord entered and invaded human history.

Twenty centuries of introspection gradually carry us to lofty mystical heights and we forget the reality of Christ's birth and its implication for mankind. It was an intrusion and the Lord meant it to be so. He wanted to gain our attention. He did not want us to forget or be confused. Jesus' birth encroached upon the personal lives of all it touched.

None knew that better than Mary. The Holy Spirit penetrated her very womb. For nine months she nurtured the divinely implanted baby and offered Him the most important gift of our frail humanity. Omnipotence invaded her reputation, social standing, and romantic dreams of living happily ever after in a rose-covered carpenter's home.

Linked to the great intrusion by his betrothal, Joseph, the foster father, was required to obey by unquestioningly accepting God's revealed will. An angelic visitor left no room for previous plans for a conventional Jewish wedding. Later he demanded flight, no time for husband and wife to settle business affairs, no time for explanations to loved ones, no time to even gather their beloved personal belongings. The great intrusion consigned them to be refugees in a distant land, aliens in Egypt.

Now if anyone deserved an undisturbed night's sleep, it was the shepherds. As outdoor men and rugged individualists, they earned their rest. Yet the great intrusion sprung upon them by ecstatic angels, took precedence and required a response.

"Go," one of them half-commanded, half entreated. "...go to that stable, respond to the invitation to be guests of Mary, Joseph and the Infant."

Respond they did. How many new mothers relish uninvited visitors just hours after delivery? Our stereotyped Nativity scenes depict Mary presentably well-groomed, Joseph proudly presiding, and Baby Jesus conveniently sleeping. When the shepherd visited, was Mary

indisposed? Was Joseph rearranging animal stalls and fodder to accommodate the mother and child? The ragtag shepherds probably invade the privacy of an exhausted family, even through we know Mary did not suffer the ordinary ravages of child-birth because these are the results of sinfulness and Mary was already delivered of that quality shared by all other women in humanity.

The star, a celestial phenomenon, did not conveniently fit the Magi's well- patterned and, orderly astrological charts. Yet, curious and resolute, these Easterners descended upon Jerusalem and aroused Jewish royalty and intelligentsia.

Apparently, they triggered Herod's paranoia. His command to find the birthplace threatened Jewish expertise. Gentile astrologers seemed better able to grasp prophecy than did the so called believing Jews.

The people, of Jerusalem, too, were affected, although from a distance. They had seen Herod's psychotic anger aroused and now, understandably, they trembled. How could the Magi know their innocent caravan would incur the holocaust of Bethlehem?

Yes, unquestionably, the feast of the Nativity of our Lord is an intruder. And because of it, we, too, can become intruders, nay, participants and partakers.

God's righteousness and unapproachable purity make legal concessions to our depravity. Our sinful existence affronts and insults His radiant glory. Yet, while we are in our vilest condition, He arranges for us to intrude upon His holiness and sanctity, no He insists and invites us to participate in His eternal glory by assuming our humanity. "By His doing we are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us Wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" 1 Corinthians 1: 30.

Because of this most solemn feast, because of this holy day of God becoming man in the person of an Infant Child, we can encroach upon the sovereignty of God. How can the Messiah of galaxies seemingly give us the free will to reject Him? How great and unlimited can this God of ours be that He endows us with the absolute freedom of accepting or rejecting His love, His salvation?

We cannot even begin to comprehend His sovereignty or our free will. Our only response is to bow in worship and adoration, because we respond to His first shown love with feeble, but acceptable human love and devotion.

We are invited to not so much intrude, but actually participate at will in His very presence. Our prayers are received at the throne of grace where our heavenly Father teams us with two veteran intercessors: The Holy Spirit "The Spirit, too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech. He who searches hearts knows what the Spirit means, for

the Spirit intercedes for the saints as God himself wills" Romans 8: 26, 27; and the Lord Jesus Christ, "Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he forever lives to make intercession for them" Hebrews 7: 25.

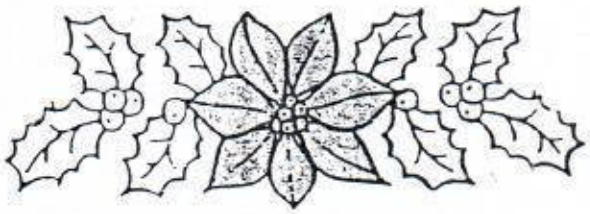
But the most audacious intrusion is our right to partake of His glory. Jesus requested our inclusion in the glory shared by the Holy Trinity before the world began: "Father I desire that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, in order that they may behold my glory, which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world" John 17: 24.

The Blessed Trinity did not create us and enact the saga of salvation out of boredom, loneliness, or discontentment. They share perfect oneness with one another, which is to be shared with created man. Still, Jesus prays that we might invade the sanctity of the Trinity's privacy because we have the privilege as given us through baptism and empowered by chrismation, "I have made your name known to them and will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them" John 17: 26.

The will of the Blessed Trinity is that man be saved; all the powers of heaven assist and testify to this intention. The present ministry of His Body, the Church focuses on conforming us to the image of His Son; His future plans call for us to so continue and thus share the riches of His grace. He has insisted we intrude on His plan for all eternity. He has thus made us an integral part of heaven's never-ending joy.

This feast of the Nativity of our Lord, may your heart be a worthwhile manger to hold the gift of God's love, the Infant of Bethlehem, long foretold.

Let not your hearts be busy inns that have no room for Him, but cradles of the living Christ and His Nativity!



Blessed Nativity

"You shall call his name Jesus and he shall save his people from their sins..."

It is the time of the birth of our Saviour once again, with bells ringing and children singing hymns that tell of that original day when in a manger lowly, deep in a cattle shed, Jesus the meek and lowly laid down His baby head. But the world is so changed that it is difficult to experience the joy, the release, the hope we once knew at this glad season.

Angels from heaven offered peace, but peace is hard to find. They told of a Saviour born, but little attention is paid to the One Who makes this feast possible. Carnal man has substituted all sorts of secular songs and embellished them with holiday merchandising, but the gift of the Christ Child is wholly over looked. We even honor each other, more than Him on His day! What He brought along with Him: 1) the Incarnation of God's Son, "the Word made flesh and dwelt among us"; 2) Salvation from sin for "unto you is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord"; 3) The fact of Satan's defeat and the hope of Christ's coming again, establishing peace and righteousness over all sinning, warring, and suffering people. For thirty three years, the Eternal God dwelt upon the earth, teaching, healing, saving. For some twenty centuries there has been a Risen, Glorified God-Man in heaven at the right of the Father, together with Holy Spirit interceding for us. He will come again and judge our souls and bodies. "His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace... Nations will beat their swords into plowshares, and learn war no more."

What a day awaits us, simply because Christ is come among us today!

Down from heaven, Jesus came.
Sharing earthly sin and shame.
Down to earth from God above,
Demonstrating God is love.

Down from glory to the black
Of a world that turned its back
On the light that God has given,
Glorious radiance of heaven!

Down from power, adoration!
Down, rejected by His nation;
Spit and scoff and mocking cry,
On a pagan cross to die!

Down from Life effulgent, free;
Living with eternity.
Down, into the dismal gloom
Of dark death, the stenched tomb!

Down from heaven to our race,
Shepherds see that blessed face;
Angel choirs lift the strain,
"Peace on Earth, good will to men."

They Offered Him Presents

"The wise men knelt down and worshipped him; then they opened their bags and offered him presents: gold, frankincense and myrrh" Matthew 2: 11.

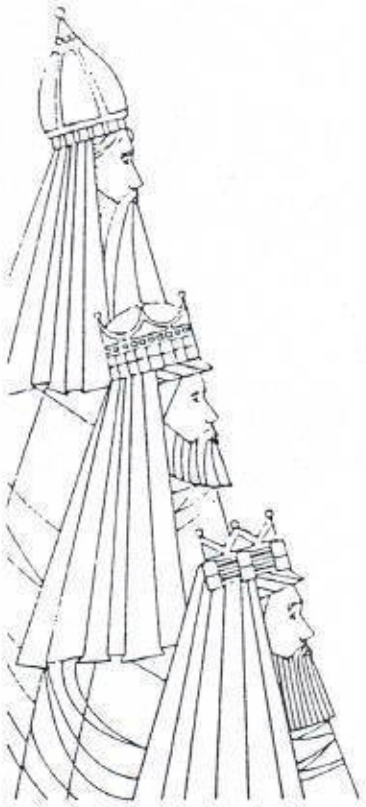
Frankincense was presented to Christ by the Wise Men. It is a specially prepared gum or resin taken from certain trees in Arabia and India by slitting the bark, much as syrup is extracted today from maple trees in New England.

As offerings are placed before God in the holy temple, the incense was mixed in a burning sacrifice, and its fragrance ascended heavenward as the priests offered their prayers for the people.

This very same frankincense is use at divine services and burned in a censer. When the incense is blessed it becomes a sacramental and a source of blessing for believers. It is sprinkled upon a glowing coal of charcoal from a covered vessel known liturgically as a "boat." Its burning signifies real zeal, its fragrance, virtue, and its rising smoke, prayer, ascending upward to the throne of God Himself.

There are numerous references to incense in Scripture, especially in the Book of Exodus "The Lord said to Moses, 'Take an equal part of the following, sweet spices, stactem, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. Use them to make incense mixed like perfume. Add salt to keep it pure and holy. Beat part of it into a fine powder and take it into the tent of my presence and sprinkle it in front of the covenant ark. Treat this incense as completely holy, dedicated to me" Exodus 30: 34.

According to the Lord's instructions, the Church utilizes incense to glorify His Name in worship and remind us our prayers ought to ascend before His throne as does the burning clouds of incense.



Did You Know That ...

...heaven does not have a rear entrance?

...if you have trouble falling asleep, try prayer?

...excuses do not lead to holiness?

...the best excuse for not coming to church on Sundays and holy days is not as good as actually being there?

...people of faith come to the healing services?

...we should leave sadness to the devil and his angels?

...true believers should always rejoice and be glad?

...we can choose to be holy?

...we ought to think often about why God chose us for salvation in Christ?

...healing of the body occurs when the faith commitment of the individual equals the magnanimous offer of God the Father?

...now is the best time for saving our soul?

...secularism is waging a strong battle for the attention of our soul?

...the devil is angered when we repel his influence in our lives?

...people interested in part-time Christianity are not interested in our parish?

...if you seek the challenge of Christ in your life you will find it here?

...if you wish to enter a sound marriage, both eyes and ears must be widely opened to Christ for guidance?

The glorious Nativity in the flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ

Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians 4: 4 – 7. Brethren: But when the fullness of time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of hi s son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." So that he is no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, an heir of God through Jesus Christ.

St. Mathew 2: 1 – 12. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came Magi from the east to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the new born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him." But when King Herod heard this, he was troubled and so was all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and Scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem of the land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, for from you shall come forth a leader who shall rule my people, Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the Magi secretly, and carefully ascertained from them the time when the star appeared to them. And sending them to Bethlehem, he said, "Go and make careful inquiry concerning the child and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may go and worship him." Now they, having heard the king, went their way. And behold, the star that they had seen in the east went before them until it came and stood over the place where the

child was. And when they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly. And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him. And opening their treasures they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Synaxis of the Birthgiver of God

Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews 2: 11 – 18.Brthren, For both he who sanctifies and they who are sanctified have one and the same Father. For which cause be it not ashamed to call them brethren saying, "I will announce your name to my brethren; I will sing your praise in the midst of the assembly; I will put my trust in him, and again, Here am I and the children God has given me!" Now, since the children are men of blood and flesh, Jesus likewise had a full share in ours, that by his death he might rob the devil, the prince of death, of his power and free those who through fear of death had been slaves their whole life long. Surely, he did not come to help angels, but rather the children of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God on their behalf, to expiate the sins of the people. Since he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted.

St. Matthew 2: 12 – 23. But when the Magi departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, saying "Arise, and take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I tell you. For Herod will seek the child to destroy him." So he arose and took the child and his mother by night and withdrew into Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod that there might be fulfilled what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son. Then Herod, seeing that he had been tricked by the Magi, was exceedingly angry and he sent and slew all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had carefully ascertained from the Magi. Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice was heard in Rama, weeping and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children and she would not be comforted, because they are no more." But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Arise and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." So he arose and took the child and his mother and went into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and being warned in a dream he withdrew into the region of Galilee. And he went and settled in a town called Nazareth, that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophets "He shall be called a Nazarene."

St. Stephen Protomartyr

Acts of the Apostles 6: 8: -15 and 7: 1 – 5, 47 - 60. 1n those days, the Stephen already spoken of was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called "Synagogue of Roman Freedmen," that is, Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia, undertook to take Stephen in debate, but they proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke. They persuaded some men to make the charge that they heard him speaking blasphemies against Moses and God, and in this way they incited the people, the elders and the Scribes. All together they confronted him, seized him, and led him off to the Sanhedrin. There they brought in false witnesses who said, "This man never stops making statements against the holy place and the law. We have heard him claim that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us. The members of the Sanhedrin who sat there stared at him intently. Throughout, Stephen's face seemed like that of an angel. The high priests asked if the charges were true. To this Stephen replied "My brothers! Fathers! Listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia and before he settled in Haran. God said to him, leave your country and your kinfolk and go to the land I will show you. So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God made him move from there to this land where you now dwell. God did not give him any of it as his heritage, not even a foot of land, but he promised to give it to him and descendants after him as a possession – although he had no child.

It was Solomon, however, who constructed the building for that house. Yet the Most High does not dwell in buildings made by human hands, for the prophet says, "The heavens are my throne, the earth is my footstool; what kind of house can you build me?" asks the Lord. What is my resting place to be like? Did not my hand make all these things?" You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are always opposing the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did before you. Was there ever any prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? In their day, they put to death those who foretold the coming of the Just One; now you in your turn have become his betrayers and murderers. You who received the law through the ministry of angels have not served it." Those who listened to his words were stung to the heart; they ground their teeth in anger at him. Stephen, meanwhile, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see an opening in the sky and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand." The onlookers were shouting aloud, holding their hands over their ears as they did so. Then they rushed at him as one man, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses meanwhile were piling their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As Stephen was being stoned, he could be heard praying, "Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And with that he died.

St. Matthew 21: 33 -42. The Lord said, "Listen to another parable. There was a property owner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug out a vat, and erected a tower. Then he leased it out to tenant farmers and went on a journey. When vintage time arrived he dispatched his slaves to the tenants to obtain his share of the grapes. The tenants responded by seizing the slaves. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. A second time he dispatched even more slaves than before, but they treated them the same way. Finally, he sent his only son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' When they saw the son, the tenants said to one another, 'Here is the one who will inherit everything. Let us kill him and then we shall have his inheritance!' With that they seized him, dragged him outside the vineyard and killed him. What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do to those tenants when he comes?" They replied, "He will bring that wicked crowd to a bad end and lease his vineyard out to others who will see to it he has grapes at vintage time." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scripture, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure. It is the Lord who did this and we find it marvelous to behold!"

"FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN . . ."

The Birth of Jesus Christ is shrouded in mystery. The "how", "when" and "where" of this miraculous event will, perhaps, never be clearly defined to the satisfaction of everyone. The "why" of our Lord's Nativity, however, is perfectly evident to men and women of faith.

The Creed explains to us the reason for Christ's coming to earth: He came for OUR sake and for the sake of OUR SALVATION! God gave us the greatest "gift" of all that first Christmas when He took on human flesh and became a Man. Throughout the course of history, many have rejected this "gift", but, as John's Gospel tells us: "As many as have received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." In Christ's own words: "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Christmas has long been known as a time for secular celebration, but just as the Christ-Child lies in the middle of every Nativity Icon, so must He remain the focal point of our joy as we commemorate His Birth. May our prayers and thoughts reflect the beautiful message contained in the following hymn attributed to St. John of Damascus: "O Lord, You have come to Bethlehem, You have dwelt in a cave, You have been placed in a manger, O You, Whose throne is in heaven. You surrounded Yourself with shepherds, O You, Who are surrounded by the Host of Angels, in order to save Mankind, since You are full of compassion. Glory to You, Our Saviour."

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