

Sillies.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD



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, 2011

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

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.

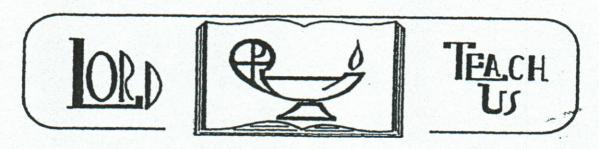
It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels 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

+++ Our celebration today is concluded with Festal Anointing. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Born!" to which we respond, "Glorify Him!" Please be certain you are with us Monday and Tuesday to share in the blessing and joy of this blessed feast day!

+++ Please remember in prayer on Thursday, the remembrance of the 14,000 innocent boys slain by Herod and join in the weeping of Rachel for their souls as they are no more!

- +++ We share with those who did not join us on our blessed pilgrimage of faith to Taylor Pa., a cotton ball which was immersed as much as we were allowed into the sacred Myrrh being emitted before our very eyes by the miraculous icon of the Birthgiver of God. Please see Father after today's celebration and embrace it in the very spirit our good God offers it to us!
- +++ We thank our gracious souls who contributed in our parish to Food for the Need. Father has distributed it to needy families in the name of our gracious and generous God who uses us as vehicles through whom He can manifest his kindness and goodness. God bless you devoted souls!
- +++ We are pleased to acknowledge the kind generosity of Debra and George Szmaida in offering the candles which grace the Altar Table, the Table of Preparation and the Sacramental Table for today's feast of the Nativity. They provide us with an example of the new-born Christ Child as the Light of the world and are offered in loving memory of Debra's aunts, +Anna Noveshalski and +Marie Mecka. We pray the merciful Lord continues to bless Debra and George with good health and grants the souls of +Anna and +Marie a blessed repose and creates for them Eternal Memory!.
- +++ 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 this past week: Tithe Offering, Candles, Food Coupons, Nativity Candles, Flowers, Flowers, Flowers, Holyday. Kitchen, States for a total of States. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.
- +++ 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, Pani Lucas, Mary Jaakobs, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleni Pallas, Debra Szmaida, Paul Szmaida, 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 from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.
- +++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.



God Is Unique

Before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no Saviour Isaiah 43: 10, 11.

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known John 1: 18.

Eye has not seem, nor ear heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him 1 Corinthians 2: 9.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sin and their lawless deeds I will remember no more Hebrews 8: 12.

For God is true and will not put away from him the memory of your work and of your love for his name, in the help which you gave and still give to the saints Hebrews 6: 10.

And I pray that...you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it.... God who by his mighty power at work within us is able to do for us far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of, infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts or hopes Ephesians 3: 17-20.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders Exodus 15: 11?

For there is born to you this day
in the city of David
a Savior who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be the sign to you:
you will find a Babe
wrapped in swaddling cloths,
lying in a manger.
—Luke 2:11-12

"And she will
bring forth a Son,
and you shall
call His name Jesus,
for He will save His people
from their sins."
—Matthew 1:21

Wonderfully Made

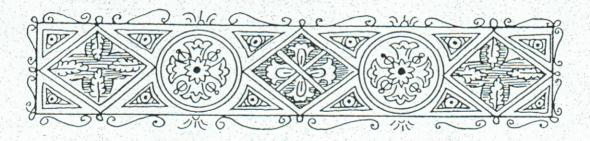
How great and wonderful are your works... who would not revere and praise your name, O Lord? Revelation 15: 3, 4.

Myriad things, numberless examples remind us that the works of God are great and marvelous and wonderful: the spectacular vistas of nature, the wonder of birth itself, the richness and diversity of human language and creativity can all stir the heart to praise our Creator God!

Perhaps, though, for all that we might rejoice in the wonders of creation and the richness and generosity of the Creator, we sometimes fail to include our own lives in the important list of God's great and wonderful works. Yet it is very true the shape of our own heart did not escape the notice of our God nor form outside of his loving attention and labor. Nor, once formed was I set adrift outside of the Creator's love and tender care.

Yes, the twists and turns of life, a sense of our shortcomings, even failings, can blind us to the dignity we possess simply by virtue of the gift of life. Think for a few moments of the countless way each of us is blessed in our individuality and uniqueness! Each, too, is expected to contribute to the good and advancement of the cause of the Saviour in our own special way. There is something to the fullness of faith we can bring and offer worthily. That distinct perspective, the special wave of love, the different flavor of zeal in Christ's name we all bring to advance the gospel of the Saviour is reserved to individuals who recognize themselves as vital contributors to the salvation of mankind.

Our particular giftedness is needed, is expected to make a success of the message of the Lord among us. Our contemporary world needs our now-present response to the freely offered and first-shown love of the Saviour. Numbered as we are among God's wonderful gifts, among his wonderful works, each one of us has cause to recognize, to revere and to praise the name of our Creator God.



Feast Of The Nativity

Christ coming among us in the flesh is an historical event graciously willed be by our eternal and loving Father as the path to our rebirth, the transfiguration of all mankind and the entire world of created things. In the Nativity of our Lord, the Orthodox Church celebrates the renewal, and sanctification and recreation of the whole universe.

Through the tender mercy of our God, the day from on high dawns upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. The darkness of the cave of the Nativity icon is an engaging and rich symbol. It makes us think of that night outside time, the eternal mysterious night of the generation of the Word by the unbegotten and eternal Father,

When all things were in perfect silence and the night had come to the middle of her rapid course, your almighty Word leaped down from your royal throne Wisdom 18: 14, 15.

The self-emptying of the Godhead -kenosis - His complete abasement for our sake is shown by the swaddling clothes, the cave, the manger. The invisible God in nature becomes visible flesh for the sight and the touch and approach of man, for the healing of him whose life was fractured in original sin. The swaddling clothes in which the Virgin wraps the Child point to the shroud in another cave, the sepulcher to follow at the end of His abbreviated life among us. The inviolate Virgin prefigured the inviolate tomb. The Lord came forth from both, preserving the seals intact.

Eve became the mother of all living in the flesh, in the new Eve we have the Mother of all the redeemed. The Virgin Mary is the highest thanksgiving offering that mankind could make to the Creator, and in that Virgin mankind affirms the salvation that is to come by means of the Incarnation of the very person of God, the Word. We celebrate this feast of renewal, of recreation, of all who are born upon the earth, renewal through this new Eve. Mary's central position in the icon of this fest as well as her size points to her unique role. She is immediately beside the Child, yet outside the darkened cave because she never lived in the dark regions of sin.

Christ is placed in the darkness of the cave because He must transform the sinful world through the grace of His Father and brighten it once more with the genuine luster of recreation.

This magnificent holyday should inspire us with joy and happiness because the gentle finger of our eternal Father has touched us and we have been renewed. Hope is renewed and our humanity is changed. We are no longer merely human. Our Saviour has come and assumed our nature and imparted His divine nature to us. Our longings and yearnings of centuries past have finally been fulfilled in this holy day.

Our sincere prayer is that all come to know the joy and freedom which is imparted by this feast day. We are summoned with an urgency to be like this Infant of Bethlehem, to emulate Him, to permit Him entrance into our souls and hearts so that we can achieve the final purpose of our creation which is ultimate transformation, transfiguration, ultimate engaging change, ultimate elevation to the dignity the Infant brings from heaven to earth. We pray the joy, the peace, the tranquility of soul, the faith which this feast initiates and causes to arise within us, fill our days, our entire lives and inspire us to celebrate its meaning each moment, each day, each year of our earthly life. A new day has dawned. Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!

Feast of Recreation

St. Gregory Nazianzen sums up the Orthodox view of the Nativity of our Lord in his famous statement that the feast "is not a festival of creation, but a festival of re-creation." The birth of Christ although a historical event is not an end but a means to the renewal, sanctification and recreation for the whole universe. Actually, we commemorate not so much the birth of a child as the ultimate re-birth and transfiguration of all mankind and with it, the whole world of creation itself. The word held in bondage by reason of man's perversion, by reason of man's treason is the world Christ redeemed. Christ redeems humanity and by taking humanity to himself, redeems the world.

The universe is radically transformed by the coming of Christ in the flesh. When the Word of God was made flesh, He not only became the head of a new race, He became the Lord of creation. Christ in His flesh took the whole of creation to Himself that it might share anew in divinity. In Christ Jesus the universe was radically transformed; in His person the world was consecrated and sacramentalized; clay and stone, plant and animal, word and dance, our earth was redeemed, re-created!

While it is true to say Christ redeemed humanity and by humanity He changed the world, it is equally true to say that Christ redeems humanity and by humanity redeems the world. Objectively men were redeemed but in another sense that was only the beginning of a new world even until now. By the power of the Holy Spirit working in Christians the world can arise anew. By reason of the love of God, made known to it in Christ Jesus, our world is alive now, vibrant in our day with life and light. Creation fell by human failure; now it summons us with urgency to redeem it. The whole world is one great yearning cry; creation's unceasing call for redemption.

And so the Nativity of our Lord is the feast of re-creation; it is the feast which bespeaks the continuing mission of Christ and His re-created followers to answer creation's call for redemption.

Visual Expression

Perhaps the very best expression of this basic approach of the Orthodox believer to the feast of the Nativity of our Lord is the traditional icon of the Birth of Christ. The icon of the Nativity contains two main lessons: it teaches the reality of the actual event, the indisputable reality of the birth of God in human affairs, the manifestation of the Incarnation of Christ, underlining by its details both the divinity and the humanity of the Word made flesh. Secondly, the image indicates the effect of this wondrous event on the world and its ultimate re-creation in the reconciliation of all things on earth and in heaven "It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him, and by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross" Colossians 1: 20.

The sacred icon brings together all creation to join the "happening" of the Nativity and to render service and thanks each in his own way. "What shall we bring you, O Christ, when you were born on earth for our sake; for each of the creatures who have their being from you, brings thanks to you: angels, their songs, the heavens a star, the wise men gifts, the shepherds wonder, the earth a cave, the wilderness a manger, but we, the Virgin Mother" Vesper Verse.

As we examine the icon carefully we notice that central to it is swirling darkness, the mouth of the great abyss, the cave of Bethlehem, symbolic of the soul, the body, the world, in awesome and inexorable continuity struck by sin and hungering for the light of redemption to pierce the darkness. A light points out the LIGHT which shatters the darkness! The star of Bethlehem casts its long rays illuminating the One who broke the bonds of hell and darkness and death forever and by His emptying Himself of Himself was born for our sake; the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger prefiguring the very cave – sepulcher and shroud of His death and burial.

Occupies A Central Place

Attending the new-born One is the Mother of God, the holy and ever Virgin Mary, who occupies a central role in the drama of redemption and is larger in scale than any of the other figures. She is the "renewal of all born on earth", the new Eve, the mother of re-created mankind. She is mankind's great gift to the Incarnation and through her all men give their assent to the wonder of this profound mystery. She sits, the living throne of the "king of all", and by the absence of the usual suffering of child-bearing proclaims the wonder of the Virgin birth and the divine nature of the One she bears. And brings into the physical world. Dumb nature is also given a central position by the presence of the ox and the donkey, ever deemed important by the Church despite the fact that the scripture does not even mention their presence. Yet they always appear in the center, representatives of the whole world of nature re-created by the coming of the Saviour.

Doubt Represents All Men

Joseph is seen strangely dejected outside the central grouping. He is not the father and this point is emphatically made by separating him from the main drama of faith. He sits troubled, doubting, and worried against the blackness of the cave which reaches around him in his misunderstanding. He is struggling to accept the miracle that takes place before him and in the struggle represents not only himself but all mankind who with similar turmoil wrestles with the fact of the Incarnation manifested which seems beyond words or reason. Wistfully he looks back over his shoulder to ponder the holy scene. In many icons, satan disguised as a shepherd stands before Joseph and tempts him as he has done to many since, to disbelieve in the efficacy of the Virgin birth.

The temptation of Joseph is balanced by the faith and belief of the Magi who approach on beast of burden. Following the star and in another scene arrive at the foot of the manger to present their gifts and themselves "the beginning of the nations" to the Lord.

Angels representing the celestial world carry out their two-fold function of adoration and glorifying the Saviour as well as announcing to the unseen shepherds the glad tidings of great joy. The icon is usually completed by a most tender scene transmitted by the apocryphal gospels stressing the humanity of Christ and His submission to the requirements of nature as he is carefully bathed by two midwives.

The icon of the Nativity of Christ is the visual rendition of the song of the Church on this feast: "The Virgin today brings forth the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable One. Angels give glory with the shepherds and wise men journey with the star, because for our sake is born as a little child, the Eternal God!"

The Orthodox Christian who venerates this icon proclaims the wondrous event of the "bringing forth of the Transcendent One" and the attending re-creation of the whole universe which has now been set in motion by this little child, The Eternal God. "Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!"



GOD'S GREATEST GIFT

Prayers For Opening Gifts

Before Opening The Gifts

O Lord, our God Who gifted the world with your presence;

Grant us eyes to see in each of these gifts a wondrous glimpse of Your great gift, Jesus, our Saviour.

Give us a new vision:

That we may see, in view of the bows and ribbons, the tags and bags, the paper and the tape, so fragile and precious in their peculiar beauty, a tiny glimpse of the swaddling clothes and skin, the flesh and bone, that wrapped the fragile, precious gift of Christ.

Give us a new vision;

That we might dig beneath the wrappings to the objects they cover up, the items we will carry from this festive tree into our lives. And may we too, see beneath the seasonal wrappings of manger and stall, of crèche and infant babe, to the surprise that underlies them. God – miracle of miracles – is with us!

Give us a new vision;

That our eyes may be open to see beyond the contents of these packages to the thoughts – the love, the concerned care, the heartfelt concern - that each of these gifts embody. And with these gifts as a hazy reflection, may we be awe-struck by the depth of your love, embodied in the holy, beautiful Infant of Bethlehem. Amen.

After Presents Are Opened

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;

Lead us, Lord, as we carry the joyful celebration of Your Nativity presence into every aspect of our lives.

O Wonderful Counselor:

Lead us to seek Your counsel, daily, through prayer and meditation, that our lives might reflect Your healing Word.

O Mighty God;

Open our eyes to Your holy might, present here in nature's wonder, a baby's sigh, a family's love, a smile shared.

O Everlasting Father;

Remind us that we are your children; brothers and sisters in a family of believers. Teach us to live in love.

O Prince of Peace:

Make us practitioners of peace in our world that all those affected by warfare, hostility, violence and bloodshed might gladly enter Your peaceful reign.

Live in us, live through us. Live with us. May Your presence be our present to this world.

A Tale of Giving

The Legend of St. Nicholas of Myra

Born in the late third century, Nicholas was the son of a wealthy couple in what is now present day Turkey. His parents died when he was still a young man, and, having been left with a generous inheritance, Nicholas devoted himself to acts of Christian charity. When a citizen of Nicholas' hometown lost all his money, the poor man feared that his three daughters would never have a dowry for their weddings. Nicholas, seeing the opportunity to use his gifts to help others, intervened. Late at night, while the poor man and his daughters were asleep, Nicholas tossed a small sack of gold through a window. Surprised by the mysterious gift, the man's eldest daughter now had a dowry, and was soon married to her beloved. Again, Nicholas provided a midnight parcel for the second daughter who was also soon married in dignity. The poor man, anxious to discover the identity of the gift-giver, waited up late into the night. When a bag of gold came

flying through the window, he leaped out the door and found the generous Nicholas fastly sneaking away. The man offered his great thanks and told everyone he met of Nicholas' humble generosity. The legend of St. Nicholas teaches us not only the value of selfless giving, but also the importance of giving that is especially tailored to the needs of those we love, an appropriate image for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, when we, in the darkness of our deepest need received the greatest Gift of all!



And when we give each other Feast day gifts in His name, let us remember that He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars. and the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans. and all that lives upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit... And to save us from our own foolishness, from all our sins, He comes down to earth and gives HIMSELF!

hen the shepherds heard angels singing to praise the coming of the Incarnate Christ, they ran to their Shepherd and contemplated the Spotless Bamb who had been pastured in Mary's womb. And in her praise they sang:

Rejoice, thou mother of the Bamb and Shepherd,
Rejoice, safe fold of spiritual flocks.
Rejoice, thou rampart against foes unseen.
Rejoice, thou key unlocking Heaven's gate.
Rejoice, for sky and earth rejoice together,
Rejoice, for earth sings canticles with heaven.
Rejoice, voice of apostles, never silent,
Rejoice, courage of martyrs yet unvanquished.
Rejoice, thou rampart for unshaken faith,
Rejoice, thou brilliant sign of God's own grace.
Rejoice, through thee is stripped the realm of
Hådes.
Rejoice, Through thee were we reclothed in glory.

Rejoice, maiden bride!



I have come to bring you peace.

Not the peace of the season, for it is too fleeting,
Not the peace of the carol, for it is nostalgic,
Not the peace of the greeting card, for it is too slick,
Nor the peace of the crib, for it is too wistful.



Rather, I have come to bring you peace, Peace of the ordinary, the daily, the homely, Peace for the worker, the driver, the student, Peace in the office, the kitchen, the farm.



I have come to bring you peace,
The peace of accepting yourself as I fashioned you,
The peace of knowing yourself as I know you,
The peace of loving yourself as I love you,
The peace of being yourself as I am who am.



I have come to bring you peace,
The peace that warms you at the completion of a task,
The peace that invades you at the close of the day,
The peace that sustains you at the beginning of the day,
The peace that reinforces you when you
reconcile with another,
The peace that touches you when your family is in order.



Without peace, my coming is unfulfilled.
Without peace, my birth is forgettable.
Without peace, Christmas is a contradiction.
I have come to bring you peace.

(Author unknown)

This Feast Of The Nativity,

Give a gift of yourself.
Mend a quarrel.
Seek out a forgotten friend.
Share some treasure.
Give a soft answer.
Encourage youth.
Keep a promise.
Find the time.
Listen...
Laugh a little.
Laugh a little more...

Express your gratitude.
Welcome a stranger.
Gladden the heart of a child.
Take pleasure in the beauty
and wonder of the earth.
Speak your love...
Speak it again...
Speak it still once again.
And let your heart be filled
with holiday joy.

(Author unknown) -

This Child Smiles

Infant child lies fast asleep, Tiny fist pressed close to cheek. Does he sense his visitors Drawing near to him they seek? Does he feel the warmth of sheep, Smell the clover-breath of cow, Hear the songs the shepherds hear, Somehow see three kings who bow? Fast asleep, what dreams are dreamt? Dusty years of sorrow and pain. Taste of gall upon his lips, Touch of tears as soft as rain? Who can know? The kings cannot, Far from home such weary miles. "Look," they cry with elbow nudge, "Sleeping, dreaming, this child smiles!"

Nativity Feast Day Felicitations

Christ Is Born! As thoughts turn to the Nativity scene in Bethlehem so long ago, our prayerful soul turns to you, our beloved spiritual children and communicants in faith. To you our faithful and good parishioners, who like the Wise Men at the time of the Lord's Nativity, were filled with joy and faith, and 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 pre-eminent place in the manger of your soul. May you approach the manger with awe and genuine devotion. May you, like them, come to Him and not count the price. May you be filled with faith commitment that will persist throughout your life.

To those who visit with us today, we pray that your lives be enriched by your worship of the Blessed Trinity in our midst. May you also be touched by the grace of the Holy Spirit which is stirred up among us as we celebrate this Divine Liturgy. May this self same Spirit Who descends and transforms the meager gifts of bread and wine also descend upon us and transform us into genuine disciples of this new born Infant of Bethlehem.

And we also grow those who come among us and join us today, but only today. For these souls, our prayer is the most intense, and sorrowfully most profound because they do not worship our God each and every Lord's Day. We pray the grace of this glorious feast transform the heart and soul of he lukewarm and indifferent, that lives be changed and enriched.

And changed they can be because our God is most generous in His love for sinners. Like the inn-keeper, some will not permit the Christ Child in their lives. But today, may you be inspired to overcome the burdens which separate you from Christ entering the mundane affairs of your trouble-filled lives.

As the Shepherds saw the glory of the angelic throng and praised our Heavenly Father for the story they heard in word and song, so may each of you beloved souls find reason for praising our God anew, that in this holy and blessed season we live the truth that Christ is Born for everyone, all of us. Our devout prayer for all entrusted to our spiritual care is that the Infant of Bethlehem fill our hearts and souls with spiritual gladness, our homes with good cheer, our family life with holiness and sanctity and our lives with His choicest blessings, today and throughout the coming new year. Glorify Him!



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 Ephratal 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.

Did You Know That ...

- ...the swaddling clothes spoken of in Scripture about the new-born Christ Child pressed down on the arms at each side, like binding a wound with a bandage because it was believed this strengthened the child?
- ...the site of the cave in Bethlehem is on the southwest side of town and has a marble slab protecting the actual spot of His birth with a silver star in the center exposing the stone slab upon which laid the manger?
- ...fifteen lamps burn night and day above the star -sign where Christ was born?
- ...the name "Magi" indicated a class of astrologer/priests who specialized in the study of nature and the placement of the stars and their relationship to historical events?
- ...although Scripture does not mention three Wise Men, this is inferred from the number of gifts presented the Christ Child?
- ...gold was presented the Saviour in recognition of his kingship?
- ...frankincense is a rare and expensive gum or resin taken from a tree by slitting its bark and was used as mixture in the burning sacrifice of the temple?
- ...myrrh is a desert resin from a shrub found in the near East and was used much as we use moth-balls today?
- ...some three hundred Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the Nativity of our Lord?
- ...the gifts of the Magi were not only prophetic, but practical as there was a great monetary need for the journey to Egypt?
- ...the star guided the Wise Men for up to two years in their search and travels to Bethlehem to find the Christ Child?

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



St. Matthew 2: 12 - 23. But when the Magi departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, saving "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 saving, "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."



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. 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 forefold 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!"



IF THEY ONLY HAD KNOWN!

n 1798, a man went to the front desk of the finest hotel in Baltimore and asked if he could have a room for the evening. He was dirty and disheveled; he looked like a farmer who had just come in from working in his fields. The manager instantly decided that this was not the type of person that should be staying in his elegant establishment. He lied to the man. telling him there were no rooms available. Imagine the manager's shock when a co-worker told him that "peasant" was Thomas Jefferson, the Vice President of the United States at the time - a man whose first love was farming. It is said that the hotel manager never quite got over his great blunder, and that he would constantly lament: "If only I had known it was the Vice President. I would have given him our finest room."

As we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ, one of the intriguing aspects of the Christmas Story is that somehow, no one had room for Joseph and Mary as the time for her delivery drew near. After the fact, the innkeepers who rejected them probably echoed the words of the Baltimore hotel manager: "If we only knew that the Baby about to be born was the Messiah. We would have found room for Him."

As Christ went about doing His chosen work, many others joined the ranks of the Bethlehem innkeepers and failed to find room for Him in their lives and failed to recognize Who He was. Christ's ministry wasn't terribly successful. The world had no use for Him until it was crystal-clear that He was the Son of God.

We certainly should know Him, and we certainly should find room for Him in our lives. Our lives must be centered on Him, for He came into the world for our sake, and for the sake of our salvation. This is His gift to us. Our gift to Him must be our unending love.

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