



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh

December 25, 2012

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

+++ We embrace lovingly all our parish faithful in body and soul and greet you warmly with a holy kiss on this glorious feast of our Lord's Birth!

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Debra, Dianna, Michael and Rosalee.

+++ All are invited to participate with us in the Nativity Reception following this feast day Divine Liturgy. We encourage everyone to offer a seven day candle to burn before the Nativity Icon for the feast day celebration.

+++ We acknowledge with deep gratitude the recent thoughtful gift to our parish of two boxes of Seven Day Candle Offering Envelopes by the Vestal Publishing Company, publishers of our parish bulletin. We pray our Lord continues to bless them and loved ones with good health of body and soul for Many & Blessed Years!

+++ We express our sincerest gratitude to Mrs. Debra Szmaida in offering the candles which beautify and decorate our altar table, sacramental table and table of preparation on this glorious feast in blessed memory of our late devoted parishioner and her spouse, +George Szmaida. We pray the merciful Lord continues to comfort Debra and loved ones in their loss and grants a blessed repose to the soul of +George and creates for him +Eternal Memory!

+++ The special offering for this Birthday of the Lord is taken today. Having prayed about we then make a generous appreciative offering for the gift of salvation coming into our lives.

+++ 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: Tithing Offering, \$492.00; Candles, \$23.00; Holyday \$45.00; Kitchen, \$304.00; Food Coupons, \$200.00; In Blessed Memory of +Steve Shwahla by wife Theresa, \$100.00; Flowers, \$5.00, for a total of \$1169.00. 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

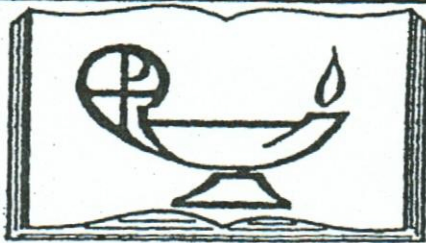
+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Michael George, Maria Garcia and Pani Buletza.

+++ 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 **\$1694.00** 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 \$5550.00 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 in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

LORD



TEACH
US

God Is Trustworthy

In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed Psalms 22: 4, 5.

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the sons of men, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth; he returns to the earth in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help, who hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, these and all that it contains; who guards truth forever Psalms 146: 3 – 6.

Fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe Proverbs 29: 25.

Your word O Lord is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens Psalms 119: 89.

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys his servant? If you walk in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God Isaiah 50: 10.

For God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone James 1: 13.

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war Revelation 19: 11.

O Lord, the God of truth... Psalms 31: 5.

You desire truth in my inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart Psalms 51: 6.

Abba

At the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, the sonship of Jesus and the adopted sonship of mankind is obviated with the chanting of the Galatian epistle. The Body and Bride of Christ wishes to make it readily understandable that believers in Christ, because of his coming among us in the world, have the same intimate, tender and warm relationship with God the Father that a small child has with his dad.

Abba, the emphatic state of the Aramaic noun, *ab* is an invocation of God in primitive Christianity, "O Father!" This Aramaic word was never used of God in the Old Testament, and very seldom of God in later Jewish literature, although it naturally is used of one's human father; taken over into later Hebrew, it is used in the familiar sense of "daddy," as distinct from the regular Hebrew word, *ab*, for formal "father."

In the New Testament, Abba is used in addressing God both by Christ,

He kept saying, "Abba" "Father," you
have the power to do all things Mark 14:
36,

and by the faithful,

You did not receive a spirit of slavery,
leading you back into fear, but a spirit
of adoption through which we cry out,
"Abba!" "Father!" Romans 18: 15;

The proof that you are sons is the fact
that God has sent forth into our hearts
the spirit of his Son which cries out
"Abba" "Father!" You are no longer a
slave but a son! And the fact that you
are a son makes you an heir, by God's

design Galatians 4: 6, 7,

as an expression of the most intimate relationship; that exists between God and his children. In all three passages of the New Testament the Aramaic word Abba is immediately followed by its Greek equivalent, *patir*. This peculiarity is explained in various ways. It is not impossible that Jesus himself used both terms since Palestine as is well known at that time was bilingual.

Some explain the double term by supposing early Greek catechists wished to retain the original Aramaic word used by our Lord because of a certain sacred aura of mystery connected with it, while at the same time it was thought necessary to translate it, in order to make it intelligible for new believers who were not Jews.

It is possible that in the two Pauline passages, there is an allusion to the ceremony of baptism, when the neophyte stood and recited the *Our Father* for the first time with the attendant congregation of believers.

Christ Is Born!

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND PEACE TO HIS PEOPLE ON EARTH!

Wake, O Earth, wake everything!
Wake, and hear the joy I bring.
Wake, and joy; for all this night,
Heaven, and every twinkling light,
All amazing,
Still stand gazing;
Angels, Powers, and all that be,
Wake; and joy this Sun to see.

Hail, O sun! O blessed Light
Sent into this world by night;
Let thy rays and heavenly powers
Shine in these dark souls of ours;
For most duly,
Thou art truly
God and man, we do confess;
Hail, O Sun of Righteousness!



ALMIGHTY GOD, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word:
Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through
Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Wonder of the Incarnation

The very Son of God who existed before all ages, is the invisible one, the incomprehensible, the one without flesh, the Beginning of beginnings, Light of light, the Fountain of life and immortality, the Image of the archetype, the Immovable Seal, the Perfect Resemblance, the Definition and Living Word of the Father; He it is who comes to his own image and embraces our nature for the good of our own nature and unites himself to an intelligent soul for the good of may soul, to purify by likeness. The Son of God absorbs in himself all that is human except sin. He is conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who had been first prepared in soul and body by the Holy Spirit, his birth in the flesh is treated with honor and virginity is received and extolled with new enduring honor. He comes forth as God, in human nature He has absorbed, one being, made of two opposite elements, flesh and spirit, spirit gives diversity and flesh receives and is elevated by it.

“He who is wealth itself is made poor; He takes on the poverty of flesh that we may gain the wealth of his divinity. He who is fullness in himself accepts becoming empty; He empties himself for a brief period of time that we may all share in his total fullness. We need Almighty God to take our flesh and die that we might love and live. We died with him that we may be purified. We rise again with him because we died in sin with him. We are glorified with him because we have risen again with him.”

During the incipient Nativity Fast days we nourish our faith and stimulate our hearts and minds by remaining faithful to our daily sacred reading, in particular the prophets and the Fathers of the Church. They are our daily companions on our Nativity Fast journey. They feed and sustain us as pilgrims on the road to the cave of Bethlehem. It is sad, indeed, to acknowledge that many Christians never read the books of the Old Testament or some of the early Church Fathers. They forget, somehow, that Christ is truly present in the events and writings of the Old Testament, especially in the writings of the prophets. When we hear the prophetic word, it is the Lord himself who is speaking to our hearts. Christ once reproached the disciples on the way to Emmaus for being *fools of slow heart in believing and accepting all that the prophets have spoken*. Both the prophets and the Fathers of the Church are God's messengers, and with their solid teachings they do help us in deciphering the inner contents of God's precious treasured message St. Gregory Nazianzen.

The Nativity of Our Lord...

a great story told,

a deep mystery revealed

"Christ is born, glorify Him; Christ descends from the heavens, receive Him; Christ is on earth, elevate Him. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. All you nations praise Him with joy, for He is glorified"
Matins, Nativity of our Lord.

As we overlook history, there are some events, dates and places which remain unforgettable in the mind of mankind and as such dwell also in the heart as a deep experience and inspiration for the shape of his upright character and the betterment of civilization. Such an incident with divine and human character is the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ which became the very center of man's history and divided the ages between before and after Him not only in time but especially, in thought, faith and social relations among men.

Every thought and social movement is classified as *Before Christ or Anno Domini* with the usual abbreviation of B.C. and A.D. not only as an event in a certain time and place, but especially as an event with the influence of the religious faith of Jesus Christ, that is, His person, His deeds, and His gospel. It includes the experience and faith of the individual and as such the event of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the Logos-Word of God, has an intimate appeal to every faithful believing individual.

The Nativity of our Lord is an annual celebration of Christ's Birth. At this time, the faithful soul, like the shepherds, hears the angel's triumphal announcement; and then kneels before the manger

an wonder and adoration with the Divine Child; like the Wise Men, offers gifts of admiration and devotion; like the Apostles, proclaims the Good News to the people; and shows his credentials of full obedience as a faithful ambassador and servant of the will of God. The Christian individual has the privilege to re-endorse his admiration and devotion to the Incarnate Word and his undertaking to serve his neighbor in God's name, according to His will.

The faithful believer accepts and receives the Birth of Jesus Christ as the most precious gift, as a divine Companion of his life. His counsel and grace will be the shield to protect him from the offences of evil; He will lead man into the realm of happiness; He will grant man peace from above to resist within the troubles of the outside world.

Jesus Christ is not a gift of static value for the individual to possess; He is the precious gift of dynamic power for the faithful believer in order to become and to be. The faithful believer prepares the manger of his heart and soul to receive the new Child and to nourish Him with prayer, devotion and deep faith as friend, companion and Saviour.

The feast of the Nativity of our Lord inspires the believer to approach it and be enriched by the salvation it offers in the birth of the Prince of Peace.

The Birth Of Jesus Christ Was In This Way

The Evangelists St. Matthew (1: 18 - 2: 23) and St. Luke (1: 26 - 2: 52) give us an account of the birth of Jesus Christ from the Annunciation to the return from Egypt. In two pages these sacred writers chronicle the facts of dates, places, people and angels, circumstances, parents of Christ, shepherds, wise men, the Star, kings, scribes, prophets, announcements, recognitions and so

many other minute details forming a most compelling, beautiful and picturesque tableau for which St. Luke especially has been acclaimed as superb in artistry with words.

Some sixty years after it took place, these holy Evangelists wrote down the divine story and preserved it for us. But who gave them these details which have the assurance of an eyewitness? Who was the source of the redemptive story? It was not only the sole witness, but she who was the chosen vessel who gave birth to Him; it was His mother, blessed and full of grace (Luke 1: 28), the historian *par excellence* of the account of Christ's birth because "his mother kept all these sayings her heart" Luke 2: 51.

The faithful believer is urged to read for himself the story and sage of the Nativity of our Lord as related by St. Matthew (1: 18 – 25) and St. Luke (1: 26 – 56 and 2: 1: 20) in order to have an immediate knowledge of this wonderful, world-shaping, epoch-making, life-changing and death-conquering event.

This recommendation for reading is always to be carried out in connection with the thoughts of previous faithful interpreters in order that the reader may have a constancy of the truth as it has been deposited in the Church. For this reason St. Matthew's narrative is cited with some thoughts and insights.

18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way: When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Spirit.

This verse is a continuation of the statements (Matthew 1: 1 – 17) of the genealogy of Jesus Christ in which He is announced as the son of David and son of Abraham to show that He is the Christ Who was announced by the prophets. These words introduce a new and marvelous way of birth, but they have also the assurance of factual story. The Evangelist refers to Mary as betrothed, as wife, as woman and as a virgin, which are all in harmony with the Hebrew law of marriage. The Jewish betrothal could be dissolved by divorce because the betrothed virgin was considered a widow if her fiance died (Genesis 29: 21; Deuteronomy 22: 23). The marriage was completed when the groom took the bride into his home.

The Virgin birth of Christ is presupposed throughout Matthew's narrative. It has nothing to do with the accounts of pagan mythology of children born of a god and woman. The Nativity of Jesus Christ is a very different kind of birth. From the beginning the Church believed that Christ "was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary" as was later recorded in the Creed. Only Matthew and Luke tell the story of the Nativity of Christ. Mark, John and the Apostle Paul take it for granted and deal with the meaning of the Incarnation or its implicit theology. It seems that Matthew's account is from Joseph's viewpoint and Luke's, from that of Mary.

19. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately.

Joseph was a just man, was a devout observer of Jewish law and as such, a merciful and kind man, that is to say, honest and clement. The dilemma of St. Joseph was obvious, whether he should bring Mary to the court, with all its publicity and shame, or

give her a divorce privately. He decided to put her away privately, which means to divorce her quietly. His compassion was such as would provide a fitting atmosphere for her child, Jesus.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take to yourself Mary as wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Only Matthew and Luke (Acts) among the writers of the New Testament refer to dreams. This seems to be the only way of communication on this special occasion. The Christian has no need of any dream now because of the fulfillment of the will of God in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Thus, Joseph is being counseled to forget any thought of divorce and to take Mary into his home. Therefore what comes from the flesh of the Virgin, as St. Paul states, "born of a woman" Galatians 4: 4, and not just simply would appear as if through a channel. This child would be human as well as divine.

21. And she shall bring forth a son and you shall name him Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.

The angelic announcement does not say that she will bear *you* a son, the word *you*, which is included in the account of the birth of St. John the Baptist (Luke 1: 13), is omitted here. This Son to Whom she gives birth is not simply only her Son or that of Joseph, but belongs to the whole world. The name is also given by the angel Gabriel in the Annunciation scene (Luke 1: 31). Its meaning is given in the verse of St. Matthew. The name in English is a literal translation of the Greek equivalent rather than the more accurate

Hebrew *Joshua*, which means *Yahweh* or salvation. In other words, Jesus means Saviour.

The word *he* in the Greek text is repeated for emphasis because He shall save by bringing about and being the actual good news which take place on this feast. His people are primarily the Hebrew people, but in substance this means all the people who believe in Him. The Creed reads, "Who for us men..." which conveys the idea that every believer in Him without discrimination or exclusion in race or nation. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ consists in the remission of sin; it is granted to men of repentance and faith, by which they are allowed to enter the kingdom of God.

22. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord to the prophet, saying....

Matthew introduces the prophet as he usually does, to show the agreement between the angel's announcement and the prophet's words. There is a consistency which is obviated. The prophecy is not the cause of the event; and the purpose of the event is not merely to fulfill the prophecy. The event itself has its roots in the very ancient will of God. It is the fulfillment of the will of God which He promised through the prophet. The verse stresses the fact that the prophecy was spoken by the Lord through the prophet because though the prophecy came from the lips of Isaiah, it expressed the will of God.

23. Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means, God is with us.

This verse is a quotation from Isaiah 7: 14 in the Old Covenant Septuagint (LXX). The Hebrew text contains the word *almah* which means a young woman who has not yet been a wife, it does not contain the word *bethulah*, meaning a virgin who does not intend to get married. The translation of the Old Testament into Greek in the third century BC renders the Hebrew word *almah* into the Greek word *parthenos*, *virgin*. Whatever word maybe used, the prophecy specifies a virgin birth. The Prophet Isaiah presents the miraculous birth as a sign of the Lord to convince King Ahaz (Isaiah 1: 13). If it were to be an ordinary birth, it would not be a miraculous sign. If it were not a virgin to give birth, then it would not be a sign at all. Matthew supports his conviction of the virgin birth with the prophet's words and the angel's announcement to answer the accusation of the Hebrew people of his time that Jesus of Nazareth was the son of a human father. The creed states clearly and explicitly that Jesus Christ "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary."

What He shall be called and how He is identified refers not only to His parents, but all people shall invoke His name saying, "God is with us!" *Emmanuel* is the name given by the prophet which Matthew rightly interprets. The name Jesus, that is Saviour, is the name given by the angel. Thus the two names complement

one another and sum up His person and mission.

24. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took her as his wife.

Thus is indicated the eagerness of Joseph to be obedient to the will of the eternal Father by the angelic command without hesitation or delay. It denotes not only his obedience, but also his inclination and his alert and impartial inspired soul. He thus dismisses the idea of a divorce and takes her into his home. The virgin no longer belonged to her family, but to the care of Joseph who also faithfully serves the divine purpose.

25. And he knew her not until she had brought forth her first born son; and he called his name Jesus.

This is an assurance that their living commonly together did not change their status as a betrothed couple. The original Greek *eos* does not mean that he knew her afterwards. Not only during this period but throughout the duration of their life together they lived in utmost chastity. The ever virginity or perpetual virginity of the Mother of Jesus was the unanimous tradition of the early Fathers and it was pronounced as dogma by the Ecumenical Councils.

It does not mean Mary had other children. On the contrary, as stated, the Church believes that Jesus Christ was Mary's only-begotten

child and first born son. St. Joseph obeyed the angel's commandment and went through the legal procedure of making the child a member of his family to give it legal status in the community of man.

St. Luke's scene of the Birth of the Lord also furnishes more details of the divine and natural surroundings, but in substance he records the same fact – the Nativity of our Lord – indicating the same awe and admiration for it. After so many years the Christian reader feels that the very treasure and epitome of the Incarnation has its roots in the inconceivable will of the eternal Father and at the same time is close to the believer's heart.

The faithful believer is surprised that the Evangelist records so momentous an event as the birth in the flesh of God in a few lines of graceful simplicity. The fact is that every writer of the New Testament and every member of the primitive Church took the miraculous birth of the Son of God, which penetrates and permeates the teaching of His gospel and His Church, for granted. The narration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ has a depth in its scope and purpose. The Apostle Paul and the primitive Church as well as the Fathers of the Church were aware of the mystery of the Incarnation and with the inspiration and the revelation of Christ Himself and they became the divine expositors of the will of God for the salvation of man.

The Revelation Of The Mystery

The Annunciation scene is the account of the presentation and exchange of the credentials of the ambassadors from heaven and earth: Gabriel and Mary. Almighty God had "made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ" Ephesians 1: 9, as an appropriate interpreter assured us along before the story of the Evangelists. The prophet Isaiah (7: 14), some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, paved the way for the acceptance and understanding of this mystery by giving a sign that "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son; his name shall be called 'Emmanuel,' that is the Son of the Most High, Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" Matthew 1: 21. Thus the Person of Jesus Christ reconciles the past and the future, becoming the unshakable bridge by which mankind crosses from its exile into the realm of eternal life in the countenance of its Creator.

The birth in human flesh of Jesus Christ was the earthly manifested beginning of the Incarnate Word, "it was the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now made known to his saints" Colossians 1: 26; it was "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings made known to all nations" Romans 16: 25, 26. It was the mystery of reconciliation through God's only-begotten Son, the Word, "when the fullness of time had come." The fullness of time came about not only through God's will, but mainly by virtue of man's preparation. Man was prepared to

accept God's will by various historical events, the innate desires of his nature, the cultivation of the spark of faith in the true God, and the prophecy recorded in the Old Testament. For many centuries "the law" of the Old Testament was our custodian until Christ came "in order to create the hope of mankind and cultivate the 'good soil' to be ready for the divine seed, the Word, so that 'he who through faith is righteous shall live'" Romans 1: 17.

This was and certainly still is the fathomless depth of the Person and vocation of the Incarnate Word, for Whom Mary, chosen to represent the entire human race in the past and the future, unfolded her admiration and devotion in hymn, in the Magnificat (Luke 1: 47 – 56). This hymn shows the lofty nature, the fine intellect, the profound religious sentiment and faith of the Birthgiver of God. She was a person knowledgeable of God's revelation and His desires for saving man. This hymn is a symphony of faith as it begins, "My soul magnifies the Lord..." This spiritual monument is the magnificent charter of admiration and devotion for the Lord by a human soul.

St. Athanasius the Great in his *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, an excellent treatise calls the redemptive work of Christ the renewal of creation and stresses the relation between creation and salvation. "The renewal of creation," he declares, "has been wrought by the self-same Word, who created it in the beginning." The fall of Adam in creation was the cause of the Incarnation and the salvation of the world in redemption was its purpose.

"All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made," relates St. John (1: 3) in his introductory to the gospel bearing his name. The Apostle Paul, a keen interpreter of the gospel, is quite explicit saying, "Yet for us there is one God, the Father from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things and through whom we exist" 1 Corinthians 8: 6. The very Creator Who made man in His image and likeness is the Redeemer to restore Him again. He who ordered, "You shall surely die," could impart life to man who sinned and eaten "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" Genesis 2: 16, and fallen into the abysmal state of death and corruption.

God could have undoubtedly revealed His divine majesty in some other and better way, but He was touched with compassion by our limitation and assumed a body, a human body like our own, a body capable of death, a sufficient exchange for all and itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling...by the grace of the resurrection to put an end to corruption because all men were clothed in incorruption in the promise of the Resurrection (On the Incarnation).

The reason and purpose of the Incarnation are stated in the prophecy for and the promise to mankind as well as fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ. The sole reason was God's love for mankind and the purpose was the salvation of man. St. John relates this both as narrative as well as factual statement, saying "For God so loved the world that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting" 3: 16., adding that the Father "gave his only begotten Son" the only one able to save mankind from the dominion of corruption. St. Paul explains, He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" Colossians 1: 13.

St. Athanasius speaks of the "offering of the equivalent for the life of all through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature." It is like when a great king comes to a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his living there in that single house, the entire city is honored. Even so it is with the king of all, the corruption of death has simply ceased to be. St. Athanasius uses the illustration of a city being attacked by bandits because of the carelessness of its inhabitants, the king saves it from destruction, "having regard rather to his honor than to the people's neglect."

By offering His own body, Jesus Christ abolished death and corrected, with His teaching, man's neglect. the demands of sin. Thus by His own power, He restored the full nature of man. This was and is the purpose of Christ's suffering and *kenosis*, or self-emptying and voluntary abasement even to death, "...that by the grace of God, He should taste death on behalf of every man to make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering...and might rescue those who all their lives were enslaved by the fear of death" Hebrews 2: 9, 10, 15. Here the writer of the

epistle gives us a depth of the mystery of the Incarnation Who has destroyed the law of death and created a new life for us "just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made to live" 1 Corinthians 15 : 21.

The purpose and way of the Incarnation of the Word are recorded in the third article of the Nicene Creed, written and pronounced by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D. It reads, "Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, and of the Virgin Mary and was made man."

Come All Believers...

In the second half of the fourth century, Christianity dedicated one day to celebrate the event of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Prior to this time, it had been celebrated on the date of Theophany along with His baptism and the appearance of the Holy Trinity. Henceforth the splendor of Christ's Birth was transferred from January 6 to December 25 in order to replace the insidious influence of pagan worship of the Sun with Christian worship of the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

On the 25th of December all Christian Churches celebrate the Nativity of our Lord with splendor and solemn religious services.

The ritual order of the services for this most solemn feast are as follows: The day preceding the Nativity, on its Vigil, the service consists of the celebration of the Great Hours, four in number which prepare for the actual

celebration. It consists of Psalms, hymns, readings from Scripture and various prayers full of exhortations and praises. Great Vespers follows the Ninth Hour, consisting of similar contents and continues with the offering of the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. On the day of the feast, Matins is celebrated prior to the Divine Liturgy. It is followed by the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The readings are taken from the Epistle to the Galatians (4: 4 – 7) and from the Gospel of St. Matthew (2: 1 – 12).

The Church of Christ celebrates the Lord's Nativity with solemn services in which she uses readings from Scripture, hymns of the highest esteem, admiration and devotion, expressed by the solemnity and honor of the day. "Come, believers, see where Christ is born" so that along with the angels, shepherds raise their voices saying, 'Glory to God in the highest to the One born today'...Today all creatures are filled with joy, for Christ is born of the Virgin...Magnify, O my soul, the King in a cave...Our Saviour visits us from on high from east of east...Rejoice, O righteous one and you heavens be glad. Sing with joy, you mountains for the Nativity of Christ." Especially on this day the faithful partake of Communion and sing the descriptive hymn, the Troparion of the feast, "Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shed upon the world the light of knowledge; for through 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 on high. Glory to You, O Lord!"

This joyful feast day challenges our attitude toward the worthiness of our salvation; it encourages hope for God's friendship and compassion; it illuminates them with the joyous announcement that the "Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth" John 1: 14. The faithful believer is expected to participate in the services to sing the hymns of praise, to join along with the angelic choir and the local shepherds, to read the divine story, and in partaking of the Body and Blood of this new born Saviour, to live the day in full with devotion and love for the God Who created and redeemed him.

The believer stands in awe witnessing the truth of his salvation. The love and compassion of Christ penetrates his heart. He approaches the revealed Mystery only by faith with a pure heart. When the admiring women of Scripture said to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you," He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" Luke 11: 27, 28, thus identifying Himself with the Word of God. The heart of the believer is the sacred place where the new born Child Jesus will be kept anew and nourished by man's love. This is the beginning of the exhortation of the Lord saying, "You must be born again..." John 3: 7 in order to become "a new creation."

Every Orthodox Christian soul gives birth to the Word, the rebirth of Christ within itself. Socrates was called a midwife because he attempted to assist the birth of a thought from the mind of whoever he was conversing with. Every faithful Christian soul replaces the womb of the Virgin Mary when she represented each

and all the faithful. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" 2 Corinthians 5: 19; "for the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" Luke 19: 10; "to save sinners" 1 Timothy 1: 15; "whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" 1 Corinthians 1: 30.

The message of the Nativity of our Lord feast day is a personal one with a practical as well as divine appeal. It is time to pacify the heart of man, it is time to dissolve the clouds of an unfriendly atmosphere among relatives and friends. It is time for the individual to humble himself and extend his Christian compassion and forgiveness to enemies, real and perceived. It is time for nations to curb their selfishness and extend their hands full of friendship in truth and practical assistance in order to establish peace on earth. May the Prince of Peace grant to each individual believer and to all the nations of the earth His priceless peace from above.

"O Christ, what shall we offer You, for your coming on earth as a Man for our sake? Every creature gives thanks to You:
the angels offer hymns of praise,
the heavens give a star,
wise men present gifts,
the shepherds, their wonder,
the earth provides a cave,
and the desert a manger.
As for us, we offer You a mother, A Virgin Mother!
O God from all eternity, have mercy on us!

The Nativity of Our Lord...

Today our Saviour is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness. No one is shut out from the joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing. Our Lord, victor over sin and death, finding no man free from sin, came to free us all. Let the saint rejoice as he sees the palm of victory at hand. Let the sinner be glad as he receives the offer of forgiveness. Let the pagan take courage as he is summoned to life. In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depth of God's wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with its Creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind. And so at the Birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: *Glory to God in the highest* and they proclaim peace to His people on earth as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God's goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly heart of man? Let us give thanks to God the Father, through His Son, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, because in His great love for us He took pity on us and when we were dead in our sins He brought us to life in Christ, so that in Him we might be a new creation. Let us throw off our old sinful nature and all its ways and as we have come to birth and life in Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. Christian, remember your dignity and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind Who is your head and of Whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's Kingdom. Through the sacramental Mystery of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so a great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ. - St. Leo, Bishop of Rome.

The Coming Of Christ

Christ is never merely He Who once came, but also He who is always to come. What the Nativity Fast is concerned with is not liturgical play acting to prepare us for His Nativity as though that had not happened two thousand years ago at Bethlehem. This is not the coming we long for and must always prepare for.

If it were that, then all the prayers and all the spiritual preparation of the Nativity Fast would be a theatrical device setting the stage for a make-believe Nativity scene. Our piety may sometimes express itself helpfully that way, but our Orthodox faith and hope must be focused narrowly on the manger or crib. The faith of the glorious feast of the Nativity of our Lord is not a backward looking attitude, trying to recall some golden age of Christ's earthly history.

Our redemption is not achieved by some instant word of Christ, some momentary act. It took His whole life of unceasing care and labor, of patient teaching and healing, of total acceptance of every human development in life and work, His Passion, His death on the Cross, and finally His Resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit. It was through all this patient self-giving by Jesus that God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself as we read in St. Paul's Corinthian Epistle (2 Corinthians 5: 19).

It is into this whole mystery of Christ that we are called by faith and love and Christian commitment in our living. The coming of Christ for which the Nativity fast amply prepares us is not just that a Child born once of Mary is come among us; it is rather the coming of Christ which is timeless, of the working of the Holy Spirit, of His grace and His salvation. Let us come to understand precisely what this spiritual preparation should be doing for us and make it our goal in this holy season.

To Hold A Candle

When you light a candle, it may seem rather like a rather solitary act. In days when candles were a primary source of light for homes, people often carried a candle with them from one room to another to help find their way and keep from stumbling. How different is the use of candles in our time and day! Here we symbolize a light that is shared, starting in a manger and spreading out to all the earth. The candle of our Holy Supper celebration draws us in a different spiritual direction. Today our world is in need of many such candles to brighten its way. Many candles, many people, many churches, all of them shining in their own way, to help spread the light Jesus brings into the world. Candles of hope are needed to encourage people, who seemingly have had more than their share of life's burdens. Candles of joy bring the warm glow of shared pleasure in following Christ. Candles of peace help those whose lives are in turmoil, as friendship and understanding give their reassurance. Candles of love enrich every life and make all life more worthwhile.

Every candle is important, but when any candle is missing, some part of your world is dark. Jesus said, "You're your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and give praise to God who is in heaven" Matthew 5: 16.

As you celebrate this feast of the Nativity of the Lord, be certain the candle of faith is lighted brightly in your life. Share its brightness with the gift of faith for someone else!

Christ's Nativity

No one can celebrate a genuine
Nativity of our Lord without being truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud,
those who because they have everything,
Look down on the needs of others, those who
have no need, even of God, for them there will be no Nativity holyday celebration.
They may observe it outwardly, but it will not have its source in their heart and soul.
Only the poor in spirit, the hungry of soul, those who need someone to come on their
behalf, will have that someone. That someone is our God, Emmanuel-God, with us.
Without poverty of spirit, there can be no abundance of God.

Nativity Matins Song

REJOICE, rejoice, Jerusalem; make merry, all you who love
Sion: today Adam's bonds are loosed and paradise is
opened to us. Behold, the Serpent is brought to nought, seeing
that woman he deceived has now become the Mother of the
Creator. Oh, the depth, the richness, the wisdom and the
knowledge of God! The very instrument of sin that had
brought death to all flesh becomes today the first-fruits of
salvation to the world, through the Mother of God: by her,
the all-perfect God has become a Babe, being born without
breaking her virginity's seal. By means of his swaddling
clothes, He has loosed the chains of our sins; by his birth as a
child, He has healed the pains and sorrows of Eve. Wherefore
let the whole creation exchange glad tidings and rejoice, for
Christ has come to renew it and to save our souls.

Peace
to soothe your soul and
smooth your way...

Wishing you
the gift of

joy

to brighten up
your life
each day...

Wishing you the

gift of

faith

To see

His promise shining clear...

Wishing you
His

love

to guard and guide you

through

the coming year!

Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!

*Like the angels, may you offer hymns of
praise to our Savior...*

*Like the stars, may your life shine brightly
before the Lord...*

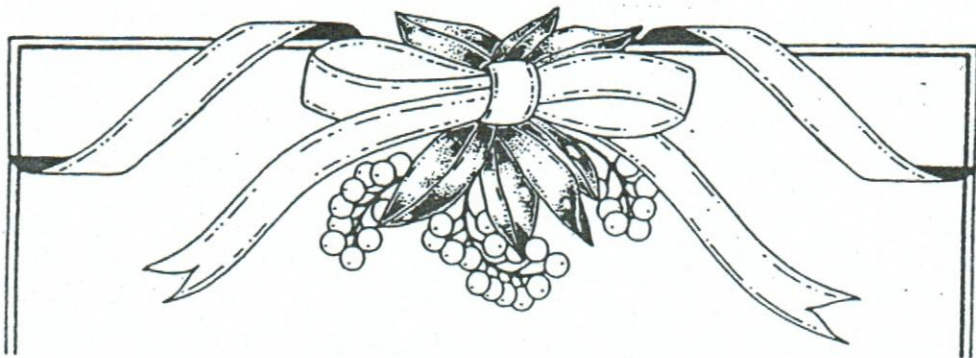
*Like the Magi, may you offer Him gifts from
a loving heart...*

*Like the shepherds, may you always be filled
with wonder and joy,
knowing that God is With Us!*



Nativity Holy Day Greetings

We behold the glory of our God in the countenance of His Divine Son born in the flesh among us today. As we look upon Him, we see how it was that we were created in paradise. And we sadly perceive the contrast of our present condition which is the reason for His coming. We are overwhelmed in soul and flesh that we have another opportunity for heaven. This Innocent Child, the Son of the Living God is born to die so that we might have everlasting life! We must therefore live that we are worthy of this awesome gift He brings from heaven and eagerly bestows upon us who follow Him. Let us together join the shepherds, the angels and the Wise Men in journeying to the House of Bread, our parish church, there to be nourished by Heavenly Bread in the Eucharist, and transformed into what we lovingly and devotedly consume. May His Nativity change us and remind us of our rightful dignity as children of God. May the blessings and the grace which descended with Him find its rightful place in our souls so that for all our days we will remain faithful to Him in all things. A most blessed and holy and faith-filled celebration to all of our pious parishioners on this awesome feast day. May you and your loved ones experience His saving power in depth of your souls!



**And
He
will be
called**

Christ

**Wonderful
Counselor
Almighty
God
Everlasting
Father
Prince
of
Peace**

Changing History

There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord
Luke 2: 11.

Today when we can make international cell-phone calls, send world-wide e-mail, and download images from space on our computers, it is difficult to imagine the impact of one small satellite the size of a baseball. But on October 4, 1957, with the Soviet Union's launching of *Sputnik I*, the world's first artificial satellite, ushered in the modern Space Age and changed the course of history. Nations rushed to catch up, technological development accelerated, and fear alternated with hope about the meaning of it all for humanity. What would be its inevitable repercussions?

But events that alter dramatically and profoundly the present and the future sometimes occur in obscurity. That is true of the birth of Jesus Christ, just one baby born to an ordinary couple in a small non-descript town

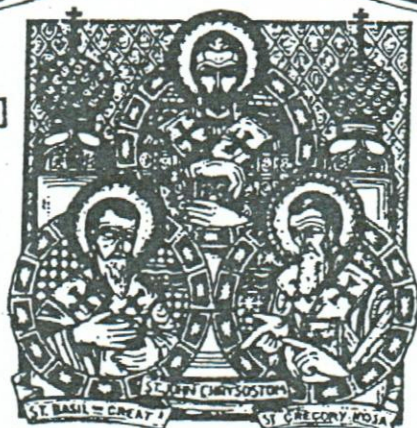
From a temporal worldly perspective this was important, but is dim compared to a more significant event for mankind. This in reality changed the course of human history. The words of an angel spoken in greeting to shepherds began to spread. Twenty centuries after, what was written of Bethlehem in song is still true and applicable: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight."

When we actually live the implications and truth of our baptism, when we open our lives to Christ the Lord and acknowledge him as Saviour and live according to the demands of that truthful conviction, the course of our future history is changed for time *and* eternity. The "...tidings of great joy to be shared by all people" Luke 22: 10, are for everyone, everywhere, whether they are computer literate or technologically aware.

The real and lasting hinge of man's history is found on the door of a Bethlehem stable. If we wish to celebrate only man's accomplishments, however great they might be, we still remain doomed. But if we embrace heartily what our God does for us, we are safe and protected. Technology has improved man's earthly life, but has not freed him from the perils of sinful death. The truth is the only enduring turning point in man's history occurred one night in a stable in Bethlehem.



Wisdom Of
The



Byzantine
Fathers

One person did the wise men adore, to one and the same did they offer their gifts, to show that he who was in a stall of animals was the very Lord of heaven St. Ambrose of Milan.

Throughout his entire history, man appears as a unique type of creature who has laboriously sought the fundamental and essential truth upon which the foundation of the cosmos rests. Man has attempted to answer the quest for truth in various ways: mythologically, philosophically, atheistically, spiritually and materialistically. However, he has not been able to solve the problem since he has tried to solve it with the categories of pure, autonomous, and atheistic humanism. Only in the miraculous Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ, is the entire eternal Truth revealed, without any defects. Further, the search for eternal Truth is completed in the revelation of the absolute divine truth within the boundaries of human nature. Thus, from the mouth of the God-man, Jesus Christ came the most courageous declaration that a human being could possibly give; "I am Truth" John 14: 6. This means that the God-man, Jesus Christ, as a Person, is Truth in all his theanthropic perfection and reality St. Justin Popovich.

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.

HEROD

Herod the Great ruled the land of Israel from 40 to 4 BC at the time of the birth of Jesus. Called "King Herod," he had been appointed to his office by the Senate of Rome. The Herod family had strong connections to Rome through the favor of Julius Caesar and became involved in the affairs of the Jewish state. The family story mentions their involvement in the Gospels of SS. Matthew and Luke and continues in the Acts of the Apostles.

He was the son of Antipater, an Idumenian and Kypros, the daughter of an Arabian king, therefore, not of Jewish descent. None of his ten wives is mentioned in Scripture.

A paranoid ruler, Herod maintained power at times by violence. He executed one of his wives and murdered his sister's husband. When he felt threatened by his nephew, he marshaled his troops against him. He also married his own niece to secure his power. With this background, it is not surprising that he issued a death sentence to a number of baby boys living in the environs of Bethlehem, the town which was the purported home of the newly-born king. (Matthew 2: 5).

While known for his use of strong force, Herod was also recognized as a master architect. Herod rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem, expanded the city walls, built a fortress at Masada, expanded the country's water supply and built a number of beautiful buildings throughout Israel that still stand, at least in part, today.

The facts about him are not preserved in profane history, but they are in accord with what the sources tell us Herod's suspicious and ruthless character.

At Herod's death, the country was divided between his three sons and each ruled over his own region.



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 his 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. In 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!'"



REMEMBER THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF CHRISTMAS

Do you recall the "Dennis the Menace" comics, which chronicled the escapades of a mischievous young lad who constantly got himself into trouble? For many years on Christmas morning, newspapers would run a particular comic strip where Dennis would be standing in the middle of his living room, which was filled with toys and discarded boxes, bows and wrapping paper. With a look of bewilderment on his face, he asks this question: "Is this all there us?" Sadly, for many people, this is all there is to Christmas — the frantic rush to purchase something for someone who doesn't really need it in the first place, and who likely will return it to the department store the following day! Thankfully, for Christians, this festive day means much more. Whatever Christmas has become in all its secular glory, the most important aspect of this joyous feast is still summed up in its first six letters: C H R I S T! Christmas reminds us that "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Christmas is a time for us to recall that peaceful night when God sent a Savior to His people, keeping His ancient promise. It is a day for us to sing like the angelic hosts: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!" It is also a day for us to imitate the shepherds, who left from their encounter with the Christ Child glorifying and praising God, and an opportunity for us to exhibit the same perseverance as the Wise Men, seeking our King no matter the sacrifice involved.

As we sing in one of the feast's hymns of Vespers: "Heaven and earth are united today because Christ is born." Indeed, this is all there is and all we need to know about this glorious day.

Icon by Nataliya Zharsky

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