

*We would like to welcome all parish visitors and invite you to join us after the Liturgy for Coffee hour.*

# Orthodox Church of the Mother of God

OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson

Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



**Sunday, December 25, 2016**

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

**Tone 2**

Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7

## *27<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost*

**The Nativity according to the Flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.** The Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar. Commemoration of the Shepherds in Bethlehem who were watching their flocks, and went to see the Lord. Priestmonk Jonah the Martyr of Pechenga (1590).

### **Troparion – Tone 4**

*Your Nativity, O Christ our God, / Has shone to the world the Light of wisdom! / For by it, those who worshipped the stars, / Were taught by a Star to adore You, / The Sun of Righteousness, / And to know You, the Orient from on High. / O Lord, glory to You!*

### **Kontakion – Tone 3**

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, / And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! / Angels with shepherds glorify Him! / The wise men journey with a star! / Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!*



*The Nativity according to the Flesh of  
Our Lord God and Savior Jesus  
Christ*

## *Prayer Requests*

### *For Health of:*

**Bill D. Kuzemchak**, on his birthday (Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>), offered by his family.

**Robert Morris, Jr.**, on his birthday, offered by his grandmother Lore Stefy.

**Barbara Evanina**, mother of Archpriest Stephen Evanina, who is ill., **Dora Alexandris**, **Dorothy Stratton**, **Igumen Gabriel (Nicholas)**, **Mark Sovyrda**, **David Dutko**, **Archpriest Nicholas Harris**, **Christopher Olsen**, **the Nun Theodula**, and **the child Michael Manteris** who is suffering with leukemia, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

### *In Memory of:*

The newly departed servant of God, **+Anthony Tyler**, and the newly departed handmaids of God, **+Vangelica** and **+Mary**, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

***Liturgical Schedule***

**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: No Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

**Saturday, December 31<sup>st</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

**Sunday, January 1<sup>st</sup>**

9:30 am: No Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
9:45 am: General  
Confession  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

**Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

**Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

**Saturday, January 14<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

**Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

***Bulletin Sponsors:***

***Lore Stefy; Kuzemchak  
Family***

***Readings:***

**The Prokeimenon in the 8<sup>th</sup> Tone:**

Let all the earth worship Thee and praise Thee; / Let it praise Thy Name, O  
Most High! (*Psalm 65:4*)  
vs. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth! Sing of His Name! Give glory to His  
praise! (*Psalm 65:2*)

**Epistle:** Galatians 4:4-7

**Brethren**, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir of God through Christ.

**Alleluia in the 1<sup>st</sup> Tone:**

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.  
(*Psalm 18:2*)  
vs. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declare knowledge.  
(*Psalm 18:3*)

**Gospel:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Now when Jesus was born** in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.



### ***The Nativity according to the Flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ***

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city's inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable.

“I behold a strange and most glorious mystery,” the Church sings with awe, “Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid.” (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin “wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (Saint Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and said: “Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Theophylactus, commenting on Saint Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was “a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star.” Saint Demetrius of Rostov says it was a “manifestation of divine energy” (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi “fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, “Brethren, observe the Feastdays; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month.” In another place it also says, “Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world.”

In the second century Saint Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century Saint Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of Saint Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (December 28) were burned in church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Ambrose of Milan, Saint John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

Saint John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress Saint Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nicephorus Callistus, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople in the fifth century, Sophronius and Andrew of Jerusalem in the seventh, Saints John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maium and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople in the eighth, the Nun Cassiane in the ninth, and others whose names are unknown, wrote many sacred hymns for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church on this radiant festival.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called “Theophany” (“Manifestation



of God”). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from Saint John Chrysostom’s sermon on the Nativity of Christ: “it is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized.”

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that “Jesus began to be about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in certain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both Feastdays and the Feastdays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. The angel said to the shepherds, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:10-20).

Thus the Nativity of Christ, a most profound and extraordinary event, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings proclaimed to the shepherds and to the Magi. This is a cause of universal rejoicing for all mankind, “for the Savior is Born!”

Concurring with the witness of the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, in their God-inspired writings, describe the Feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound, and joyous, serving as the basis and foundation for all the other Feasts.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



**Bulletin Sponsor:** Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend, for a donation of \$10. Sponsors will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

**Memorial Candles:** Candles be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one.

**Private Confessions:** Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times.

**General Confession:** Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

**Pannikhida Service:** The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

**Special Announcements** for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail:

[OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com](mailto:OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com)

**The Living Clean Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

**The Grey Book Step Meeting Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.



### *Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Parish News*

***May everyone have a blessed Nativity according to the  
Flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ***

Next Council meeting: January 29, 2017

Annual Parish meeting: February 12, 2017 after Divine Liturgy



*NY/NJ Diocese News*

**Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of the Nativity 2016  
The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord**

Dearly Beloved of Our Diocesan Family: Christ is Born! – Let us glorify Him!

“For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life.” -- St. John Chrysostom, Sermon on the Nativity

As we celebrate again the glorious Feast of Our Lord’s Nativity, and gaze upon the Icon of the Birth in the flesh of the Son of God, lying in the manger of a cave, let us remember what the Saints of our Church, like St. Irenaeus of Lyons and Athanasius of Alexandria, have taught us: “God became Man so that we might become like God.”

This is the purpose, the meaning, and the destiny of our lives: to become like God. It is what we were created for, made “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26-27). The Infant Messiah, named by the angel “Jesus Christ,” born on Christmas night, is “the express image (‘ikon’ in Greek) of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). He has come to earth to show us how to achieve “theosis” or “divinization” – how to become “merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36), “perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). He has come to show us how to be “sons and daughters of the Most High God.”

The key is for us to follow Jesus’ example. He shows us how to “be” by the way He lives: humble and meek, honest and chaste, obedient and pious, kind and considerate, not judgmental but forgiving. Above all else, He is loving – to all who come to Him and to all those in need. Our Christian life must be an imitation of His Love.

As we greet each other with the shout that “Christ is Born!” ... our celebration is somewhat clouded by the knowledge that for too many in our country, Christmas is only about family and friends, food and drink, football and, of course, presents from Santa. For so many – our neighbors next door, our co-workers at the office, even members of our family – today is Christmas without Christ. And a growing number of these good people have self-identified their faith as “none.” They have no church affiliation; they may say they are spiritual but not religious; they may believe in God, but they do not express that belief in any ceremonial way.

How can we translate our age-old faith for today’s “nones”?

We achieve this by living the Christ-like example, ourselves. If people see us truly in love with Our Lord and Savior, then we offer them witness to the gracious Son of Man Who incarnates what He proclaims: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Far too often, we Christians have accepted and presented our faith as a system of rules and regulations – a system “nones” have no desire to follow. While the Old Testament gives us the “do’s and don’ts” of the Ten Commandments, Our Lord offers us something greater – the how “to be” of the Beatitudes. To be Christ-like in our thoughts, words and deeds, is to gain His blessing: “Blessed are the poor in spirit ... the meek ... the merciful”. If we keep the Commandments, we are not following rules, so much as following Jesus’ example – faithful to His Father, obedient to His mother, honest and chaste, kind and considerate, forgiving and accepting, and loving.

For too long, we have presented the Church to others as a business or corporation, a club or organization that compels members to pay mandatory “dues” and “assessments”, and fulfill other requirements. This sends a bad message to those outside the flock. We must show that the Church is a Family that offers us a Father and a mother; makes us brothers and sisters in Christ; and commands us to care for the needs of each other and those outside the family as well. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).

Critics of the Church say that we are judgmental, condemning and excluding of others. This is not what the Lord taught! He preached “returning to God” in repentance, and being welcomed and forgiven and loved. We must restore that approach, if it is not ours already. Christ warns us, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt 7:1) – and He forgave and welcomed the cheating tax collector, the sinful woman, and the life-long thief. He gives us the Holy Mysteries, the Sacraments, as sources of His grace for our forgiveness, healing, and eternal life. It is the Eucharist – Holy Communion – that makes us one with Him, members of His Body the Church: “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).

Too often, we ourselves complain about so many divine services, their length and seeming repetitiveness ... and we attend with a sense of obligation. This sends a wrong message. We love God, and we come to Church because we want to be with Him often. We honor the Lord’s Day – Sunday – because He rose from the dead that day to offer us eternal life. We celebrate the great events in His and His people’s lives on feast days: “[T]his day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations” (Ex 12:14).



Those outside the Church fail to see the value of prayer and fasting and almsgiving, because we do not present it properly. Too often we ourselves complain about the Lenten seasons and disciplines. We must pray, as Our Lord showed us – when He would set Himself apart from the disciples and commune with His Father; and as He taught us, in the beautiful Lord’s Prayer. We fast, because He fasted – abstaining from meat in honor of His flesh betrayed on a Wednesday and sacrificed on a Holy Friday. We give alms, because He gave to all who came to Him in need – miraculous healing, soul-saving forgiveness, limitless love and acceptance. His “final test” for us is “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matt 25:40), expecting us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned in His Name.

My beloved, we need to celebrate this Nativity today as our reception of the Gift of Love from the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). And then we need to spend the rest of the year, the remainder of our lives, reflecting that Love in our practice of our faith, sharing that Love by reaching out to others and inviting them to “come and see” in our Church how great the Lord is, and by giving that Love tangibly to those who are in need – in our homes, in our parishes, on our streets. This may be the best chance we have to show the “Nones” the true meaning of our Faith.

Ours is not some stone cold god of the pagan past, nor a God of judgement, vengeance and retribution, nor a God Who is dead ... but the Living God of Love Who has become one of us, and is involved in our everyday joys and sorrows; Who wills our salvation, and answers our prayers in fatherly love ... and the Church that Christ founded is a community of love for God and fellowman, in imitation of the love shared among the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps in living the same “way of life” that the Apostles and the early Church lived, and that the Saints of every age have lived, we can attract the unchurched, the “spiritual but not religious,” and the non-believers ... even as the first Christians did, when they turned the world upside down, and brought the pagan Roman empire to its knees in the worship and faith of Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Remember, our first lesson is at the Manger – where we learn to be humble, meek and self-sacrificing. The last lesson is at the Cross – where we learn to be forgiving and loving and self-sacrificing. Come, let us adore Him ... by the way we live the example of Christ-like love. And let us pray that our humble efforts will inspire others “not yet of this fold” to join us in the blessed Family of the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves.

With love in our Infant Messiah,  
+Michael

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey



***Make ready, O Bethlehem!  
Salvation enters the world  
and the curse is destroyed;  
make ready, hearts of righteous men!***

***Behold, the Master, lying in a manger,  
compels us to offer our spiritual songs.***

***Let us cry out to Him unceasingly,***

***“O Lord, glory to You!”***

## **CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!**



### *Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News*

#### **Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon**

To the Honorable Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and Pious Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Brethren and Blessed Children in the Lord,

Christ is born! Glorify Him! In recent years, we have been increasingly invited to immerse ourselves in a multitude of “universes” as an alternative to our everyday lives. Most recently, yet another installment of the “Star Wars” universe was released, and surely there will be more to come, along with an endless array of similar cinematic worlds and virtual realities in the realms of sports, entertainment, the internet and in the media. While promising an escape from the mundane, such things often leave us still trapped in our own world of earthly passions and desires.

Today, as we celebrate the Great Feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, we are invited to immerse ourselves, not into the world of escape, but into that “strange and glorious mystery” by which we are transfigured and transformed, embracing the Kingdom of heaven while allowing the Lord to embrace us. We are offered the possibility of encountering, not dazzling “heroes” of the three-dimensional, high definition sort, but rather the simple beauty of the birth of the child Jesus.

In appearance, aside from its extreme austerity, there is nothing externally noteworthy to behold: a woman gives birth in a cave and lays her child in a manger. But it is precisely through these simple realities that a great mystery—the pre-eternal God embracing our human nature in its fullness—is revealed to the universe. “He Who adorned the heavens with stars has been well-pleased to be born as a babe, and He Who holds all the ends of the earth in the hollow of His hands is laid in a manger of dumb beasts.”

This mystery becomes meaningful to us through the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and through our small efforts to live with Christian kindness. This is far more than being virtuous. As Father Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “A kind person is kind because he or she accepts people as they are, covers them with kindness. Kindness is beautiful, the most beautiful thing on this earth. Virtuous people are activists, obsessed with the desire to impose their principles and goodness and easily condemning, destroying, hating.... In this world there is a lot of virtue, and so little kindness.”

Virtue is not the goal, but rather a life of humility and a struggle to discern the Lord’s very image in everyone whom we encounter. He “Whom in essence none can touch” is wrapped as a mortal in swaddling clothes that we might become “partakers of His divine nature.” If there is any element of escape here, it is rooted in the turning away from sin and the all-too-deceptive seductiveness of this world.

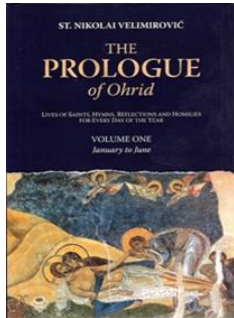




The grace of the Holy Spirit is not given to us for virtue or heroic asceticism; rather, it is rooted in the humility that transforms us as surely as the Incarnation transforms the universe. “Let the creation now cast off all things old, beholding Thee, the Creator, made a child, for through Thy birth Thou dost shape all things afresh, making them new once more and leading them back again to their first beauty.”

May the joy of this great feast transfigure us now, in the New Year to come, and every day of our lives as we await the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, yet to be fully revealed, but already fully present in the life of the Body of Christ, the Church.

With love in the New-Born Christ,  
+ Tikhon  
Archbishop of Washington  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada



## *The Prologue of Ohrid: Lives of Saints, Hymns, Reflections and Homilies for Every Day of the Year*

### **1. The Nativity of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ**

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son* (Galatians 4:4) to save the human race. And when nine months were fulfilled from the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to the Most-holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying, *Rejoice, thou that art highly favored ... behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son* (Luke 1:28, 31), at that time there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the people of the Roman Empire should be taxed. In accordance with this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and be registered. That is why the righteous Joseph came with the Most-holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal lineage of David. Since many people descended on this small town for the census, Joseph and Mary were unable to find lodging in any house, and they sought shelter in a cave which shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave--on the night between Saturday and Sunday, on the 25th of December--the Most-holy Virgin gave birth to the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving birth to Him without pain just as He was conceived without sin by the Holy Spirit and not by man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, worshiped Him as God, and laid Him in a manger. Then the righteous Joseph drew near and worshiped Him as the Divine Fruit of the Virgin's womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshiped Him as the Messiah and Savior. The shepherds heard a multitude of God's angels singing: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Luke 2:14). At that time three wise men arrived from the east, led by a wondrous star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They worshiped Him as the King of kings, and offered Him their gifts (Matthew 2). Thus entered the world He Whose coming was foretold by the prophets, and Who was born in the same manner in which it had been prophesied: of a Most-holy Virgin, in the town of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no king in Jerusalem of the lineage of Judah, but rather when Herod, a foreigner, was reigning. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind, which could not be performed by His servants. To Him be eternal glory and praise! Amen.

### **Hymn of Praise**

*The Nativity of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ*

Out of burning love, Thou didst come down from heaven;  
From eternal beauty, Thou didst descend into monstrous pain;  
From eternal light, Thou didst descend into the thick darkness of evil.  
Thou didst extend Thy holy hand to those choked in sin.  
Heaven was amazed, the earth quaked.  
Welcome, O Christ! O ye peoples, rejoice!  
Out of burning love, by which Thou didst create the world,  
As a slave Thou didst debase Thyself to loose the enslaved,



To restore the house that Adam destroyed,  
To enlighten the darkened, to unloose sinners.  
Love that knows not fear or humiliation--  
Welcome, O Christ! The Master of Salvation!  
Out of burning love, O King of all beauty,  
Thou didst leave the radiance of the beautiful Cherubim,  
Thou didst descend into the cave of human life,  
To despairing men, with a torch and peace.  
How to contain Thee?--The earth became frightened.  
Welcome, O Christ! Heaven bears Thee up!  
The most beautiful Virgin for a long time hoped in Thee.  
The earth raises her to Thee, that through her Thou wilt descend  
From the lofty throne, from the heavenly city,  
To bring health, to release man from sin.  
O Holy Virgin, Golden Censer--  
To thee be glory and praise, O Mother full of grace!

### **Reflection**

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

### **Contemplation**

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

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

### **Homily on the birth of the Lord, the Son of God**

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

The only-begotten Son of God, brethren, begotten in eternity of the Father without a mother, was born in time of a mother without a father. That first begetting is an unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity in eternity, and the second is the unfathomable mystery of God's power and love for mankind in time. The greatest mystery in time corresponds to the greatest mystery in eternity. Without entering into this greatest mystery with the small taper of our understanding, let us be content, brethren, with the knowledge that our salvation had its origin not from man or

from earth, but from the greatest heights of the divine invisible world. So great is God's mercy, and so great is the dignity of man, that the Son of God Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherd's cave, solely to save mankind, to cleanse men from sin and to return them to Paradise. I came forth from the Father, where I had everything, and am come into the world, which cannot give Me anything. The Lord was born in a cave to show that the whole world is one dark cave, which He alone can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem--and Bethlehem means "the House of Bread"--to show that He is the only Bread of Life worthy of true men.

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

**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

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***The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon***



**Broken**

*Despair is the enemy*

It is only human to become despondent when we have failed in keeping to our moral, ethical and spiritual standards, succumbing, instead, to temptation. Our Orthodox Faith teaches that we must be compassionate towards others, loving, quick to forgive, exemplar in our Christian living, and always demonstrating to the world that we belong to Christ.

Yet we also know we fail, most of the time, in living up to the standards of the Gospels, appearing no different than the pagans.

We look to the example of the saints, and wonder why we seem so far removed from their Christ-like example of living the Gospels. Over and over, we sink in the muck and mire of sin, becoming broken, downtrodden, and sick. In our brokenness we betray the Gospels, our own standards of behavior, and the expectations of others. We know the truth of the words, “There is none good but One, that is, God (Matthew 19:17),” because we fail, over and over, in our own seeming inability to live as we believe.

We know we have been called to holiness by Christ, and that He gives us the strength, courage, and even the ability, to live our lives out in holiness. Yet, try as we might, we find ourselves utterly failing to live the Gospels, failing in our witness before others, and letting down our friends and family, with behavior that is anything but an example of Gospel living. We are broken, bordering on despair.

Nevertheless, even as we struggle with our sins, we must remember that we were specifically created by God for participation in His Divinity. We have been called by Him, and have become a Royal people, specifically created to participate and share fully in the life of God. The key to this life in God is to be found in repentance. Even in our brokenness, we must not give in to despondency, for our Saviour is quick to forgive. When we have found ourselves falling short of the glory of God, we must turn toward this very God in repentance, knowing that He is quick to forgive.

When we are broken despair is the enemy, and should be seen as an emotion that has come from the Evil One. Hope and forgiveness are the gifts that come from God. During those times when we have failed in our Christian vocation, we must embrace the hope that comes with a repentant heart, and see, in our brokenness, the reminder that we are to always keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge that we have a God Who is quick to forgive. Despair is the enemy of our salvation, because in despair, the Evil One would have us believe there is no hope, and therefore no salvation. In our brokenness we must turn our gaze towards our Co-Suffering Saviour, the One Who lifts us up, out of our brokenness, making us whole, and granting us forgiveness and life.



***Daily Reflection***

**Christ Comes to the Lonely**

*“But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish... The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in a land of the shadow of death—on them light has shined.” (Is 9: 1-2)*



Jesus Christ comes to address our loneliness. He comes to fill that hole in our hearts, which we might feel even in the company of many people. It is the “gloom,” the “anguish,” the “darkness” and “land of the shadow of



*death,”* which is the result of a separation from God. This separation also creates distance between us and other human beings. Our Lord becomes one of us to overcome that distance, unifying in Himself all of us and all creation, visible and invisible. He calls me to communion with Him, and out of dark self-isolation, so that I may restore true communion with others as well.

Let’s not be lonely today, my friends, because on us – on all of us – *“a great light has shined.”* Let me reconnect with His great light today, which shines abundantly on me and everyone else in our *“land of the shadow of death,”* from a lonely cave in Bethlehem. *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people of goodwill (ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας).”* (Lk 2: 14)

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**How Many Days is Orthodox Christmas? (UPDATED for 2016)  
December 23, 2016 by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick**

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# How Many Days is Orthodox Christmas?

Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick



Well, Christmas is almost here (on the New Calendar, anyway), so we’re planning out how many days of ham we’re going to be eating, right? Or perhaps it’s several days of turkey leftovers. You’ve got to be able to cover every day of Christmas so that we’re not just singing Christmas but also eating it for the whole festal period.

But we have a problem. How many days do we have to cover? Just how many days are there in Orthodox Christmas, anyway? We will have been fasting for 40 days, so what do we get on the other end?

Well, we begin on Dec. 25, and the leave-taking of the feast is Dec. 31, so one could say that there are 7 days in Orthodox Christmas.

But of course, the fast-free days last through Jan. 4, so one could say that there are 11 days in Orthodox Christmas, even though we will have ceased singing the Christmas hymns 4 days before.

But some people include Jan. 5, which is the Eve of Theophany, so one could say that there are 12 days in Orthodox Christmas. They probably do this because they heard there is such a thing as “12 Days of Christmas.” But there’s not really anything about Jan. 5 on the liturgical calendar that looks that much like Christmas.

One could also say that there are 12 days of Orthodox Christmas if one counts the 5 days of Forefeast (Dec. 20-24), the feast day itself (Dec. 25) and the 6 days of Afterfeast (Dec. 26-31). But the Forefeast isn’t the feast. So that’s cheating.

Some people take Christmas all the way to the feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple on Feb. 2, so that’s 40 days of Christmas right there. Write that one into a song! (“On the thirty-eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...” \*collapse\*)

And some people think Orthodox Christmas is on Jan. 7, which just sets all these things forward by 13 days (right?). Of course, no Orthodox Christian celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7. (Say it with me: No one celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7.) They all celebrate on Dec. 25. Yet some people’s calendars will say “Jan. 7” on that day because they are celebrating on the Julian (“Old”) calendar Dec. 25, but they are apparently dating their holidays by what the Revised Julian (“New”) or Gregorian (“New”) calendar read on those days, which is 13 days ahead—thus, Jan. 7. But remember, if you’re celebrating Christmas on the Julian calendar, it’s not Jan. 7 for you. It’s Dec. 25. It turns out that there are two different Dec. 25s in the Orthodox Church, thirteen days apart.

And the Non-Chalcedonians are another matter entirely. Most of them don’t have a December or a January. They have other month names that don’t line up exactly with our Roman month names. For instance, the Copts celebrate Christmas on 29 Koiak (which lines up with Jan. 7 on the new calendars but Dec. 25 on the old).

And some people think Orthodox Christmas is on Jan. 6, probably because they are mixing up the Jan. 7 thing with Theophany (Jan. 6) or maybe because they once ran into an Armenian Apostolic Christian, who will certainly confuse matters entirely for you, since Armenians celebrate both Christmas and Theophany together on Jan. 6, only some people’s calendars will say “Jan. 19” (go back two paragraphs for why that is) on that day. Then again, the Armenian calendar doesn’t exactly have a “January.”

(And yes, of course there are a handful Western Rite parishes in Orthodoxy. I love them and their traditions. They have 12 days of Christmas, I believe. But I am generalizing about the other 99.99%.)

And then some people celebrate on both Dec. 25 (Dec. 25) and Dec. 25 (Jan. 7). They are wrong. But we still are planning on inviting them over for dinner. (Not kidding.)

So what’s the answer?

“WELCOME TO ORTHODOXY! Have some lamb.”

