

*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

The Most Reverend Michael, Archbishop of NY & the Diocese of NY/NJ

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Temporary Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson    Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Dean Inferrera

## HYMNS OF THE DAY

### Troparion in Tone 4

Thy 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 Thee, the Sun of righteousness, and to know Thee, the Orient from on high. O Lord, glory to thee!

### Kontakion in 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 the star, since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little Child!

## SAINTS AND FEASTS OF THE DAY

**DECEMBER 25, 2017**

**THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**



### *The Nativity 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!



### ***The Adoration of the Magi***

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 Three Magi - Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthasar***

The names of the three Wise Men (Magi) do not appear in the Gospels. The tradition that there were three visitors from the east is very ancient, but their names are only mentioned in the Middle Ages.

Bones reputed to be the relics of the three kings have been in the cathedral at Cologne, Germany since 1164.



### ***Commemoration of the Shepherds in Bethlehem who were watching their flocks, and went to see the Lord***

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 (St 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.

### ***Priestmonk Jonah the Martyr of Pechenga***

Based on the Synodikon of the Solovetsk Monastery in northern Russian about 1500 AD -- the exact date is unknown -- the Priestmonk Jonah was born in the Pomeranian village of Varzuga in Russia's northern Murmansk district. After serving as a parish priest, he entered the Pechenga Monastery, where he became a close disciple of Saint Tryphon.

Saint Jonah was martyred in December 1589 -- one year before the beginning of the Russian-Swedish War -- during an attack on the monastery by Swedish-Finnish invaders. Tradition holds that he and his concelebrant, the Priestmonk Herman, were martyred during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, as they were receiving the Eucharist. They, together with 115 monks and laypersons killed during the invasion, were venerated throughout the Novgorod region. In 2003, they were formally glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church for Church-wide veneration.

## **GOSPEL AND EPISTLE READINGS**

### ***Epistle Reading***

#### **Prokeimenon, Tone 8:**

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

## The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the 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.

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### Alleluia, Tone 1:

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*)

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## Gospel Reading

The Reading is from 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.

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### Orthodox Quote of the Day

One may have a good worldly relationship with non-believers,  
but one cannot have a relationship in prayer and one must not  
carry on arguments about religion so that the name of God not  
be offended during an argument.

### St. Nektary of Optina

Living Without Hypocrisy: Spiritual Counsels of the Holy Elders of Optina 98

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### The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon Why Christ?

Although this is not Christmas for those of us on the Old Calendar (we must wait until the 7th of January for our celebration of the Feast of the Nativity), I wish to share the following excerpt from the incredible book, "Tortured for Christ", by Richard Wurmbrand, a Lutheran pastor who suffered under the communist yoke. This event took place on Christmas Eve.

In his last days, while living in the United States, Pastor Wurmbrand converted to the Orthodox Church. This account explains why he was so drawn to Orthodoxy.

With love and blessings,  
Abbot Tryphon

## **An Undying Love**

When I was in jail I fell very, very ill. I had tuberculosis of the whole surface of both lungs, and four vertebrae were attacked by tuberculosis. I also had intestinal tuberculosis, diabetes, heart failure, jaundice, and other sicknesses I can't even remember. I was near to death.

At my right hand was a priest by the name of Iscu. He was abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his forties, had been so tortured he was near to death. But his face was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades. Don't believe the newspapers when they say that the Communists only hate Christians or Jews—it's not true. They simply hate. They hate everybody. They hate Jews, they hate Christians, they hate anti-Semites, they hate anti-Christians, they hate everybody. One Communist hates the other Communist. They quarrel among themselves, and when they quarrel one Communist with the other, they put the other one in jail and torture him just like a Christian, and they beat him.

And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony.

During the night he would awaken me, saying, "Pastor, please pray for me. I can't die, I have committed such terrible crimes."

Then I saw a miracle. I saw the agonized priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of this murderer, and caressed his head—I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love—he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, "You are young; you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart." But he did not just say the words. You can say "love," and it's just a word of four letters. But he really loved. "I love you with all my heart."

Then he went on, "If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, who is Love Incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be with Him in heaven much more than you wish to be in heaven with Him. He is Love. You only need to turn to Him and repent."

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel—no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered—near to death—received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolution to his murderer.

They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest went back to his bed. Both men died that same night. It was a Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that two thousand years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.

These are things which I have seen with my own eyes.

*A blessed Holy Nativity to all my readers who are on the New Calendar!*