

The Magi, too, sought Him,
and when they found Him in the crib,
worship instead of investigation
they offered Him in silence.
Instead of empty controversies,
they gave Him offerings.
You, too, seek the First-born,
and if you find Him on high,
instead of confused searching,
open your treasures before Him
and offer Him your deeds.

Saint Ephrem the Syrian

**Sunday 28 December 2014 is the
Sunday after the Nativity**

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Gospel: Matthew 2:13-23

Seasonal Kontakion

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!

**Apolytikion of Sunday after
Nativity**

Proclaim, holy Joseph, to David the ancestor of Christ our God the amazing wonders you have witnessed: You have seen a Virgin great with Child, you gave glory with the shepherds, you worshipped with the magi, and an angel of the Lord revealed the wonders to you! Therefore pray to Christ our God that our souls may be saved!

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Hebrews 2:11-18; Matthew 2:13-23
Holy Innocents; Abbot Marcellus

Tuesday: Hebrews 9:8-23; Mark 11:11-23
Great Martyr Anysia; Gideon the New

Wednesday: Hebrews 10:1-18; Mark 11:22-26
Apodosis of Nativity; Righteous Melania

Thursday: John 10:1-9; Colossians 2:8-12; Luke 2:20-21, 40-52
Circumcision of Jesus Christ; Basil the Great

Friday: Hebrews 5:4-10; John 3:1-15
Forefeast of Epiphany Begins; Pope Sylvester

Saturday: 1 Timothy 3:13-16; 4:1-5; Matthew 3:1-6
Prophet Malachi; Martyr Gordios



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

28 December 2014

Choosing Light Over Darkness

Today, on the Sunday after the Nativity, the Church reminds us of events around Christ's birth. We have been celebrating the joyful tidings of His birth, and the peace which He brings to all people. We know that Jesus Christ comes to inaugurate the Kingdom of God and to enable us to return to God. All of this is a cause of much joy.

Yet, in the days immediately after Christmas we have had a rather sudden reminder of the suffering and death that can await the followers of Christ. Yesterday the Church commemorated Saint Stephen, the first martyr, whose death is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (6-7). Today we also commemorate the twenty thousand martyrs of Nicomedia who refused to worship idols. And tomorrow we will commemorate the holy children who were slaughtered by King Herod in his attempt to put to death the newborn Christ.

In today's Gospel we hear how the angel of the Lord appeared to Saint Joseph in a dream, warning him of King Herod's plans to kill the newborn Christ, and how he took the Holy Theotokos and her newborn Child into exile in Egypt, eventually bringing them back to Nazareth once the danger was passed.



As we are celebrating the joy of Christmas we are given this rather sober reminder that Jesus Christ was rejected on earth from His very first days. His birth brought joy to many, but the true Light which had shone into the world also brought opposition, for there are those who prefer darkness to the Light. His birth set in motion a series of events that will ultimately lead to His great victory over the forces of darkness in His death and resurrection.

The Creator, seeing humanity that He had made with His own hands perishing, bowed the heavens and came down; but He took its whole being from a divine, pure Virgin, being made truly flesh; for He has been glorified.

From Matins of the Nativity

Saints David, Joseph & James

Today, on the Sunday after Nativity, the Church commemorates three members of Christ's earthly family: the Prophet and King David, Saint Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin, and the Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord.



King David lived about a thousand years before the birth of Christ and was the greatest of the Kings of Israel. He prefigured the Messiah who was awaited as the "Son of David. However, King David is not simply the ancestor of Christ. As a shepherd, he prefigures Jesus the Good Shepherd. As King, he announces the royalty of Christ. As an adulterer and murderer he provides a model of the penitent sinner. And as the author of the Psalms, he has provided the basis of the Church's prayer book with which countless generations have expressed their deepest longings and also found the revelation of the coming Messiah.



Saint Joseph played an important but somewhat background role in our salvation history, being the one to whom the care of the Holy Theotokos was entrusted. A carpenter by trade and a widower, he was chosen as the protector of the Virgin Mary. He was not warned of her virginal conception and so was dismayed when he learnt of her pregnancy. However, an angel of the Lord revealed to him that Christ had been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-25). An angel likewise warned him to flee with the Infant Christ and His Mother to Egypt to escape Herod's plans to kill him. Although Saint Joseph played a somewhat background role, he presents us with an important example of trustworthy devotion.



Saint James the Brother of the Lord was the head of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. In his Epistle to the Ephesians (1:19), Saint Paul tells us that after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus he went to Jerusalem to consult with Saint James. And in the Acts of the Apostles he is clearly shown as presiding over the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). He is the author of the New Testament epistle that bears his name and which challenges believers to live authentic Christian lives. Saint James was martyred by being thrown from the peak of the temple around 62 A.D. and survived for long enough to pray, "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they do," before being clubbed to death.

On Thursday, the eighth day of the Feast of the Nativity and the beginning of the civil New Year, the Church celebrates the **Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ** and His receiving of the name Jesus, which means Saviour. The Church's Liturgy tells us that Jesus underwent circumcision in order to fulfil the Law of Moses.

In being circumcised, Jesus Christ identifies completely with sinful human beings, showing the divine humility that even submits to the high priest's knife. And, in submitting Himself to the Law, He frees us from the law and from the ritual that was based on the law. As the Church chants at Matins on this day:

Circumcision has ceased, for Christ was circumcised of His own will, granting the nations remission of sins, and saving them by grace.

The feast day of your birth resembles You, Lord
because it brings joy to all humanity.
Old people and infants alike enjoy your day.
Your day is celebrated
from generation to generation.
Kings and emperors may pass away,
And the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse.
But your festival
will be remembered until the end of time.
Your day is a means and a pledge of peace.
At Your birth heaven and earth were reconciled,
since you came from heaven to earth on that day
You forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt.
You gave us so many gifts on the day of your birth:
A treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick;
spiritual light for the blind;
the cup of salvation for the thirsty;
the bread of life for the hungry.
In the winter when trees are bare,
you give us the most succulent spiritual fruit.
In the frost when the earth is barren,
you bring new hope to our souls.
In December when seeds are hidden in the soil,
the staff of life springs forth from the virgin womb.

Saint Ephrem the Syrian



On Thursday the Church commemorates Saint Basil the Great. He was born into a prominent Christian family in fourth century Cappadocia and after studying rhetoric in Athens he returned to Cappadocia where, influenced by his sister Macrina, he embarked on a monastic life, together with his friend Gregory, who would become Saint Gregory the Theologian. However, he was called to Caesarea to assist the bishop as a priest and in 370 was elected bishop. Saint Basil made a major contribution to the defence of the Orthodox faith and the explanation of the Church's theology, especially in his work On the Holy Spirit. But he was also a pastoral leader and is known for his defence of the poor and his care for his flock in times of crisis. In many places the feast of Saint Basil is associated with the *Vasilópita*, or Saint Basil's bread, a sweet bread often with a coin inside it, which is blessed and cut following the Divine Liturgy.