



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Constantine, Patriarch Pavle, Metropolitan Theodosius, Bishop Robert, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Michael Mihalick [MS], Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Charles Mezzomo, Father Anthony Dimitri, Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 7-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 3-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Erin, Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, Michael Miller, Jim Logue—throat cancer, Liz Stumpf, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Theodore Nixon, Charles Johnson, Amy Forbeck, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Gloria Prymak [Liz's niece], Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, Sabrina, George & Mika Rocknage, Elizabeth Mitchell, Robert McKivitz, Cliff Dow, Marjorie Pershing, Amy Kemerer, Tom Marriott, Joe Farkas, Liz Obradovich, Liz, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Mary Ann, Charlotte, Peter Natishan, Michael Spak, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Brandi Thomas, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Ben Bonifield—a classmate of Alex, Peter Special, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci,

Steve Sakal, Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

2009 Church Icon Wall Calendars & Envelopes are available downstairs.

Please remember David Weaver in Mosul, James John Logue & George Senita assigned to Iraq, Matthew Machak, and ALL American servicemen and women in the Middle East in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American servicemen and women—and bring them all home safely!

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR “BOXTOPS FOR EDUCATION” AND CAMPBELL’S SOUP LABELS TO CHURCH. There is a shoebox in the basement for Alex’s Sixth Grade and Matt’s Fourth Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! Love, ALEX AND MATT

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please call Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

Schedule of Services

Sunday, January 11 **Divine Liturgy** **10:30 AM**
30TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY, COMMEMORATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONES: JOSEPH THE BETROTHED, DAVID THE KING, JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD, 14,000 INFANTS [THE HOLY INNOCENTS] SLAIN BY HEROD AT BETHLEHEM, VENERABLE MARCELLUS-ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE UNSLEEPING ONES, VENERABLE THADDEUS-CONFESSOR OF STUCTION, VENERABLE MARK THE GRAVE-DIGGER, THEOPHILUS, & JOHN OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA, VENERABLE BENJAMIN-MONK OF NITRIA IN EGYPT, VENERABLE ATHEADORUS-DISCIPLE OF VENERABLE PACHOMIUS THE GREAT, SAINT GEORGE-BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA

Tone 5

Galatians 1:11-19

Matthew 2:13-23

*Litany in Blessed Memory of John Holupka—Mike Holupka
Parastas in Blessed Memory of Steve Kuzman—Debbie & John Paouncic*

Sunday, January 18 **Divine Liturgy & BLESSING OF WATER** **STRICT FAST** **10:30 AM**
31ST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY
MARTYRS THEOPEMTUS-BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA & THEONAS, VENERABLE SYNCLETIA OF ALEXANDRIA, PROPHET MICAH, VIRGIN APOLLONIA OF EGYPT, VENERABLE FORISTIRIUS & MENAS, VENERABLE GREGORY-MONK OF CRETE

Tone 6

1 Timothy 4:5-8

Mark 1:1-8

Litany in Blessed Memory of Mary Pekich—40 Days—Fr. Bob

Monday, January 19 **Obednitza & House Blessings** **10:30 AM**
HOLY THEOPHANY—BAPTISM OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Titus 2:11-14
Matthew 3:13-17

Sunday, January 25

Divine Liturgy

10:30 AM

32ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY

**MARTYR TATIANA OF ROME & COMPANIONS, MARTYR MARTIUS OF MAURETANIA, VENERABLE EUPRAXIA OF
TABENNA IN EGYPT**

Tone 7

Ephesians 4:7-13
Matthew 4:12-17

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 11 JANUARY 2009

THIRTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST—SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY
COMMEMORATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONES: JOSEPH THE BETROTHED,
DAVID THE KING, JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD, 14,000 INFANTS
[THE HOLY INNOCENTS] SLAIN BY HEROD AT BETHLEHEM, VENERABLE
MARCELLUS-ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE UNSLEEPING ONES,
VENERABLE THADDEUS-CONFESSOR OF STUDION, VENERABLE MARK
THE GRAVE-DIGGER, THEOPHILUS, & JOHN OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA,
VENERABLE BENJAMIN-MONK OF NITRIA IN EGYPT, VENERABLE
ATHEADORUS-DISCIPLE OF VENERABLE PACHOMIUS THE GREAT, SAINT
GEORGE-BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA

TROPARION—TONE 5

Let the faithful praise and worship the Word,
Coeternal with the Father and the Spirit;
Born for our salvation from the Virgin;
For He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh,
To endure death,
And to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 5

Thou didst descend into Hell, O my Savior,
Shattering its gates as almighty;
Resurrecting the dead as Creator,
And destroying the sting of death.
Thou hast delivered Adam from the curse,
O Lover of Man,
And we all cry to Thee: O Lord, save us!

PROKEIMENON—TONE 5

READER: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us and preserve us from this generation forever.

PEOPLE: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us and preserve us from this generation forever.

READER: Save me, O Lord, for there is no longer any that is godly.

PEOPLE: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us and preserve us from this generation forever.

READER: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us and preserve us...

PEOPLE: From this generation forever.

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 5

I will sing of Thy mercies, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim Thy truth from generation to generation.

Thou hast said: Mercy will be established forever, and my truth will be prepared in the heavens.

Of his (St. Basil's) care for and protection of the Church, there are many other tokens; his boldness towards the governors and other most powerful men in the city: the decisions of disputes, accepted without hesitation, and made effective by his simple word, his inclination being held to be decisive: his support of the needy, most of them in spiritual, not a few also in physical distress: for this also often influences the soul and reduces it to subjection by its kindness; the support of the poor, the entertainment of strangers, the care of maidens; legislation written and unwritten for the monastic life: arrangements of prayers, adornments of the sanctuary, and other ways in which the true man of God, working for God, would benefit the people: one being especially important and noteworthy. There was a famine, the most severe one ever recorded. The city was in distress, and there was no source of assistance, or relief for the calamity.

For maritime cities are able to bear such times of need without difficulty, by an exchange of their own products for what is imported: but an inland city like ours can neither turn its superfluity to profit, nor supply its need, by either disposing of what we have, or importing what we have not: but the hardest part of all such distress is, the insensibility and insatiability of those who possess supplies. For they watch their opportunities, and turn the distress to profit, and thrive upon misfortune: heeding not that he who shows mercy to the poor, lendeth to the Lord, nor that he that withholdeth grain, the people shall curse him: nor any other of the promises to the philanthropic, and threats against the inhuman. But they are too insatiate, in their ill-judged policy; for while they shut up their hearts against their fellows; they shut up those of God against themselves, forgetting that their need of Him is greater than

others' need of them. Such are the buyers and sellers of grain, who neither respect their fellows, nor are thankful to God, from Whom comes what they have, while others are in need.

He indeed could neither rain bread from heaven by prayer, to nourish an escaped people in the wilderness, nor supply fountains of food without cost from the depth of vessels which are filled by being emptied, and so, by an amazing return for her hospitality, support one who supported him; nor feed thousands of men with five loaves whose very fragments were a further supply for many tables. These were the works of Moses and Elijah, and my God, from Whom they too derived their power.

Perhaps also they were characteristic of their time and its circumstances: since signs are for unbelievers not for those who believe. But he (Basil) did devise and execute with the same faith things which correspond to them, and tend in the same direction. For by his word and advice he opened the storehouses of those who possessed them, and so, according to the Scripture dealt food to the hungry, and satisfied the poor with bread, and fed them in the time of dearth, and filled the hungry souls with good things. And in what way? For this is no slight addition to his praise. He gathered together the victims of the famine with some who were but slightly recovering from it, men and women, infants, old men, every age which was in distress, and obtaining contributions of all sorts of food which can relieve famine, set before them basins of soup and such meat as was found preserved among us, on which the poor live. Then, imitating the ministry of Christ, Who, girded with a towel, did not disdain to wash the disciples' feet, using for this purpose the aid of his own servants, and also of his fellow servants, he attended to the bodies and souls of those who needed it, combining personal respect with the supply of their necessity, and so giving them a double relief.

Such was our young furnisher of grain, and second Joseph: though of him we can say somewhat more. For the one made a gain from the famine, and bought up Egypt in his philanthropy, by managing the time of plenty with a view to the time of famine, turning to account the dreams of others for that purpose. But the other's services were gratuitous, and his succor of the famine gained no profit, having only one object, to win kindly feelings by kindly treatment, and to gain by his rations of grain the heavenly blessings. Further he provided the nourishment of the Word, and that more perfect bounty and distribution, which is really heavenly and from on high--if the word be that bread of angels, wherewith souls are fed and given to drink, who are a hungered for God, and seek for a food which does not pass away or fail, but abides forever. This food he, who was the poorest and most needy man whom I have known, supplied in rich abundance to the relief not of a famine of bread, nor of a thirst for water, but a longing for that Word which is really life-giving and nourishing, and causes to grow to spiritual manhood him who is duly fed thereon.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 43. 34-36 "On St. Basil"

St. Basil of Caesarea, commemorated 1/14 January

A Prayer Before Martyrdom

"Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ, Who came to call not the just but sinners to repentance, in fulfillment of Your promise You have graciously said: In the moment that the sinner repents of his fault, I forget his sin.

Accept my repentance in this hour of pain, and by means of this fire prepared for my body, set me free from the eternal fire that would burn both body and soul.

I thank You, Lord Jesus Christ, for having accepted me as a burnt offering to Your name. I thank You for having offered Yourself on the Cross as a victim for the whole world; You, the just for the unjust; The good for the evil; You, the innocent, a victim for sinners.

I offer my sacrifice to you, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, live and reign, God, forever and ever. Amen."

Prayer of St. Afra of Augusta—While still a catechumen, she was martyred near Augsburg during the persecution of the emperor Diocletian, c. 304.

With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school

What is true for parents is also true for teachers. With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school. The grace of God can overshadow them and make them good. Don't attempt with human methods to correct bad situations. No good will come of this. Only with prayer will you produce results. Invoke the grace of God on all the children — for divine grace to enter their souls and transform them. That is what it means to be a Christian.

You teachers transmit your anxiety to the children, without realizing it, and this affects them. With faith anxiety dissolves. What is it that we say? 'We commit our whole life to Christ our God.' *+Elder Porphyrios*

Respond to the love of the children with discernment. And once they love you, you will be able to lead them to Christ. You will become the means. Let your love be genuine. Don't love them in a human way, as parents usually do. This does not help them. Love in prayer, love in Christ. This is truly beneficial. Pray for each child you see, and God will send His grace and will unite the child to Him. Before you enter the classroom, especially difficult classes, repeat the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ...'. And as you enter, embrace all the children with your gaze, pray and then start your lesson, offering your whole self. By making this offering in Christ, you will be filled with joy. And in this way both you and the children will be sanctified. You will live in the love of Christ and of His Church, because you will become good during your work. *+Elder Porphyrios*

a word from the desert

Abba Ammonas was asked, "What is the 'narrow and hard way?'" (Matt. 7:14) He replied, "The 'narrow and hard way' is this, to control your thoughts and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you.'" (Matt. 19:27)

Photo captures image of an 'angel' in hospital hallway

In dark time, mom of Mint Hill teen sees light of hope

By Jane Duckwall, Special Correspondent

Posted: Tuesday, Dec. 23, 2008



This photo shows an "angel" of light Chelsea's mother saw at Presbyterian Hospital in November. PHOTO COURTESY OF COLLEEN BANTON



Colleen Banton (left) with daughters Chelsea (center) and Kaylee on Friday.

[More Information](#)

[Mom talks about hospital 'angel'](#)

When Chelsea Banton was born five weeks prematurely, doctors predicted she had 36 hours to live.

Proving them wrong was the first miracle for Chelsea, now an Independence High School freshman.

"She spent the first four months in a neonatal intensive care unit," recalls her mother, Colleen Banton of Mint Hill.

Before Chelsea was 2, she was admitted to the hospital for pneumonia, the first of several dangerous run-ins with the illness that have made her a familiar face in Presbyterian's pediatric intensive care unit.

Among other health problems in her medical history: hydrocephalus, requiring a shunt in her skull and, later, several shunt revisions; life-threatening viruses; and, this past July, fluid retention that required more than a week's hospitalization and three liters of liquid to be drawn from her body.

Prayer has helped sustain the whole family.

"We had been praying every day, my oldest daughter and I and Chelsea," Colleen Banton said. "...Praying for a miracle."

That miracle, Colleen believes, came Nov. 5 – seven weeks after Chelsea was admitted to the hospital for pneumonia.

What originally seemed like a bad cold nearly killed her.

"She was on life-support from the moment she got there," her mother said.

That was Sept. 21. Over the next six weeks in the hospital, Chelsea faced one threat after another: pneumonia in her left lung, then her right lung, then sepsis, blood clots, staph infections, E. coli, a collapsed lung and feeding problems.

In late October, doctors met with the family to discuss "a plan of action," Colleen said. One of the decisions she had to make was whether she would take Chelsea off the ventilator. Earlier, doctors had removed Chelsea from the ventilator several times, but had replaced it when the struggle to breathe became too difficult for the teen.

But a family meeting Oct. 31 was a turning point.

"At that point, the family... agreed that when she did come off the ventilator again, (they) weren't putting it back in," Colleen said. "Whatever happened, would happen." On Saturday, Nov. 1, "they took her off the ventilator and she did good," her mother said. "She was breathing on her own."

The next day, "her stats went down," and doctors put her in an oxygen mask. But over the next few days, Colleen noticed her daughter "wasn't getting better. Things were kind of lingering."

And Chelsea, who had been having anxiety attacks and crying throughout her hospital stay, was having more of them.

"I said, 'She's been through enough,'" Colleen remembers. "I said, 'Can we just take her mask off? She's been through enough.'

"I wanted to do what the Lord wanted me to do. And I really felt like I've had her for 14 years, and if it's time for her to go to heaven, then I know she'll be healed."

The mask didn't come off immediately, though. They waited until family members had a chance to come to see Chelsea – perhaps for the last time.

On the afternoon of Nov. 5, as family and friends prayed about the decision, a nurse practitioner called Colleen's attention to a monitor showing the door to the pediatric intensive care unit.

"On the monitor, there was this bright light," Colleen recalls. "And I looked at it and I said, 'Oh my goodness! It looks like an angel!'"

Colleen pointed her digital camera at the monitor to take a photo of the image, but the "first picture wouldn't take."

She tried again and succeeded. The image gave her a peace that stayed with her when hospital staff removed Chelsea's oxygen mask.

And then, "when they took the mask off of her, her stats went as high as they've ever been.

"Her color was good, and the doctors and nurses were amazed," Colleen said. "The nurse practitioner who saw the image in the monitor said, 'I've worked here 15 years, and I've never seen anything like it.'"

Chelsea was removed from intensive care on Nov. 14 and went home three days later.

Her mother believes it was a miracle – attended by a very real angel bathed in light at the door to the pediatric intensive care unit.

"What was so ironic... is it was a rainy day," Colleen said. "It had been overcast all day. And the sun only came out at that point."

To those who doubt her story and photograph, Colleen Banton says: "If they doubt it, that's fine. ... But I know what I saw, and the picture's untouched. I didn't make it up. That's just something that I believe.

"I believe that more people have changed since this happened. I know I have. I look at things differently than I used to—because I know **God is in control.**"

On Christmas Day, Chelsea will turn 15 – another miracle considering all of the medical trials she's faced, according to her mother.

"I'm learning," Colleen Banton said, "that every day she's alive is a miracle."

If the passions are restrained, no one will use violence by land or by sea. No one will lead an army to carry off and lay waste the property of others. For what are the interests of one country but the detriments of another state or nation? To extend the boundaries that are violently taken from others, to increase the power of the state, to improve the revenues—all of these things are not virtues. Rather, they are the overthrowing of virtues.

For, in the first place, the peace of human society is taken away, innocence is taken away, the abstaining from the property of another is taken away; lastly, justice itself is taken away, which is unable to bear the tearing asunder of the human race; wherever arms have glittered, justice must be banished and exterminated from thence.

Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6.6 (c. AD 310)

a word from the desert

A brother asked Abba Poemen, "How should a man behave?" The old man said to him, "Look at the prophet Daniel: no one found anything in him to complain about except for his prayers to the Lord his God."

A guy gets shipwrecked. When he wakes up, he's on a beach. The sand is dark red. He can't believe it. The sky is dark red. He walks around a bit and sees that there is dark red grass, dark red birds and dark red fruit on the dark red trees. He's shocked when he finds that his skin is starting to turn dark red too.

"Oh no!!!" he says, "I think I've been marooned!!!"

Feast of the Nativity (Birth) of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Celebrated December 25



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 (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. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem

shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. St John Chrysostom and St Theophylactus, commenting on St 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." St 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 St Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century St Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of St 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 St Ephraim the Syrian, St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, St Gregory of Nyssa, St Ambrose of Milan, St John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

St 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 St 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, Sts 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 St 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 feasts and the feasts 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!

See also: Discourse on the Nativity of Christ by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgos, Bishop of Neocaesarea.



The Adoration of the Magi

The Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. St John Chrysostom and St Theophylactus, commenting on St 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." St 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).



St Melchior of the Magi

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. The tradition that one of them was a Negro dates from the fifteenth century.

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



St Gaspar of the Magi

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St Balthasar of the Magi

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. The tradition that one of them was a Negro dates from the fifteenth century.

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.

From St. Gregory the Theologian (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series; Vol. VII; Eerdmans pg. 345):

"Again the darkness is past; again Light is made; again Egypt is punished with darkness; again Israel is enlightened by a pillar (cf. Ex. 14:20). The people that sat in the darkness of ignorance, let it see the Great Light of full knowledge (cf. Isa. 9:6). Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new (cf. I Cor. 5:17). The letter gives way; the Spirit comes to the front. The shadows flee away; the Truth comes in upon them. Melchisedec is concluded (cf. Heb. 7:3). He that was without Mother becomes without Father (without Mother of His former state, without Father of His second). The laws of nature are upset; the world above must be filled. Christ commands it, let us not set ourselves against Him. O clap your hands together all you people (cf. Ps. 47:1), because to us a Child is born, and a Son given to us, Whose Government is upon His shoulder (for with it the Cross is raised up), and His Name is called The Angel of the Great Counsel of the Father (cf. Isa. 9:6)."

Angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master; and they are astonished and exultant whenever they behold one who is made of earth forsake his dunghill and ask for what is heavenly.

St. Isaac of Nineveh (St. Isaac the Syrian), 7th century

From St. Gregory Palamas (The Homilies Vol. 1; St. Tikhon's Seminary Press pgs. 111-112):

"What can I say to those people who, in the Church, neither stand in silence, nor join in the singing, but instead meet one another and mix our reasonable worship of God with worldly chatter? They do not listen themselves to the divinely inspired words, and prevent others who want to listen from doing so. 'How long do you halt between two opinions?' as Elijah the Tishbite would say (I Kgs. 18:21). You want simultaneously to come together for prayer and for worldly, ill-timed words. Of course you succeed in neither purpose, because you destroy the one with the other, or rather, they destroy each other. How long before you stop talking idly in this place? You make this house of prayer into a place of business or impassioned speech (cf. Lk. 19:46). In this house the words of eternal life are both spoken and heard, on the one hand by us, as we beseech God for eternal life with unashamed hope, and on the other hand by God, as He gives eternal life to those who ask with their whole heart and mind. But He will not give it to those who do not even apply their whole tongue, as it were, to asking."

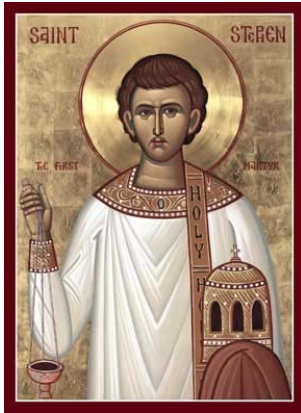


Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos—December 26/January 8

The Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos: On the second day of the feast, the Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos is celebrated. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Mary as the one through whom the Incarnation was made possible. His humanity - concretely and historically - is the humanity He received from Mary. His body is, first of all, her body. His life is her life. This feast, the assembly in honor of the Theotokos, is probably the most ancient feast of Mary in the Christian tradition, the very beginning of her veneration by the Church.

Six days of post-feast bring the Christmas season to a close on December 31. At the services of all these days, the Church repeats the hymns and songs glorifying Christ's Incarnation, reminding us that the source and foundation of our salvation is only to be found in the One who, as God before the ages, came into this world and for our sake was "born as a little Child."

Father Alexander Schmemmann, *The Services of Christmas* (1981)



Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

December 27/January 9

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called "archdeacon." He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty. In the words of Asterias, he was "the starting point of the martyrs, the instructor of suffering for Christ, the foundation of righteous confession, since Stephen was the first to shed his blood for the Gospel."

Filled with the Holy Spirit, St Stephen preached Christianity and defeated Jewish teachers of the Law in debate. The Jews maligned St Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. St Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced the Jews for persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts ch. 7).

During his speech, St Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr. Before his death St Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

The body of the holy Protomartyr Stephen, left to be eaten by beasts, was secretly taken up by the Jewish teacher Gamaliel and his son Habib, who buried Stephen on his estate. They both believed in Christ, and later received holy Baptism.

St Stephen is also commemorated on August 2 (Translation of his relics) and on September 15 (Uncovering of his relics in the year 415).

Statement by the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem on the current devastating situation in Gaza—Jerusalem on 30 December 2008

We, the Patriarchs, Bishops and the Heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem, follow with deep concern, regret, and shock the war currently raging in the Gaza Strip and the subsequent destruction, murder and bloodshed, especially at a time when we celebrate

Christmas, the birth of the King of love and peace. As we express our deep sorrow at the renewed cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians and the continued absence of peace in our Holy Land, we denounce the ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip and all forms of violence and killings from all parties. We believe that the continuation of this bloodshed and violence will not lead to peace and justice but breed more hatred and hostility - and thus continued confrontation between the two peoples.

Accordingly, we call upon all officials of both parties to the conflict to return to their senses and refrain from all violent acts, which only bring destruction and tragedy, and urge them instead to work to resolve their differences through peaceful and non-violent means. We also call upon the international community to fulfill its responsibilities and intervene immediately and actively stop the bloodshed and end all forms of confrontation; to work hard and strong to put an end to the current confrontation and remove the causes of conflict between the two peoples; and to finally resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a just and comprehensive solution based on international resolutions.

To the various Palestinian factions we say: It is time to end your division and settle your differences. We call on all factions at this particular time to put the interests of the Palestinian people above personal and factional interests and to move immediately toward national comprehensive reconciliation and use all non-violent means to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Finally, we raise our prayers to the Child in the manger to inspire the authorities and decision makers on both sides, the Israelis and Palestinians, for immediate action to end the current tragic situation in the Gaza Strip. We pray for the victims, the wounded and the broken-hearted. May the Lord God Almighty grant all those who have lost loved ones consolation and patience. We pray for all those living in panic and fear, that God may bless them with calm, tranquility and true peace.

We call on all to observe next Sunday, January 4, as a day for justice and peace in the land of peace.

- + Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
- + Patriarch Fuad Twal, Latin Patriarchate.
- + Patriarch Torkom II, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- Fr. Pier Battista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custody of the Holy Land
- + Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + Abune Matthias, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate
- + Archbishop Paul Nabil Sayyah, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate.
- + Bishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem & the Middle East.
- + Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land.
- + Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate
- + Bishop Youssef Zre'i, Greek Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate.
- Fr. Raphael Minassian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate