

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



December 17, 2017 – Sunday of the Forefathers (2nd Sunday Before Nativity) | Prophet Daniel & the Three Holy Youths

The Sunday that falls between December 11-17 is known as the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. These are the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, who lived before the Law and under the Law, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God said, “In your seed shall all of the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3, 22:18).

The Holy Prophet Daniel is the fourth of the major prophets. In the years following 600 B.C. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, the Temple built by Solomon was destroyed, and many of the Israelite people were led away into the Babylonian Captivity. Among the captives were also the illustrious youths Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael. The Holy Youths Ananias (“God is gracious”), Azarias (“whom God helps”), and Misael (“Who is what God is?”) were companions of the Holy Prophet Daniel. They were chosen to serve in the king’s palace with Daniel (Daniel 1:6), and were all from the tribe of Judah.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ordered that they be instructed in the Chaldean language and wisdom, and dressed them in finery. Handsome children of princely lineage were often chosen to serve as pages in the palace. For three years, they

would be fed from food from the king's table. After this they would be allowed to stand before his throne. Daniel was renamed Baltasar. They gave Ananias the Chaldean name Shadrach ("royal"), Azarias the Chaldean name Abednego ("servant of Nego"), and Misael the Chaldean name Mesach ("guest"). But they, cleaving to their faith, disdained the extravagance of court, refusing to defile themselves by eating from the king's table and drinking his wine. Instead, they lived on vegetables and water. The Lord granted them wisdom, and to Saint Daniel the gift of insight and the interpretation of dreams. The holy Prophet Daniel preserved his faith in the one God and trusted in His almighty help. He surpassed all the Chaldean astrologers and sorcerers in his wisdom, and was made a confidant to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Once, Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream which terrified him (Daniel 2:1-6). He summoned magicians, sorcerers, and Chaldeans before him to interpret the dream. When they asked him what he had dreamt, the king refused to tell them. He said, "If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins." The Babylonian wise men protested that no magician or sorcerer could be expected to do this. Only the gods could reveal the dream and its meaning, they told him.

The king ordered all the wise men of Babylon to be executed. When they sought Daniel and his companions to put them to death, Daniel asked that the king's sentence not be carried out. He said that he could tell the king what he dreamt, for it had been revealed to him in a vision. Daniel was brought before the king and was able to reveal not only the content of the dream, but also its prophetic significance. After this, the king elevated Daniel to be ruler of the whole province of Babylon, and the chief of all the wise men.

During these times King Nebuchadnezzar ordered a huge statue to be made in his likeness. It was decreed that when people heard the sound of trumpets and other instruments, they should fall down and worship the golden idol. Because they refused to do this, the three holy youths Ananias, Azarias and Misael were cast into a fiery furnace. The flames shot out over the furnace forty-nine cubits, felling the Chaldeans standing about, but the holy youths walked in the midst of the flames, offering prayer and psalmody to the Lord (Daniel 3:26-90). The Seventh and Eighth Odes of the nine Biblical Odes at the back of the Psalter are taken from this passage (called "The Song of the Three Holy Youths"; it is found in the Septuagint text of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church).

The Angel of the Lord appeared in the furnace and cooled the flames, and the young men remained unharmed. This "Angel of Great Counsel," as he is called in iconography, is identified with the Son of God (Daniel 3:25, Isaiah 9:6). In the

first Canon for the Nativity of the Lord (Ode 5), the Church sings: “You have sent us Your Angel of Great Counsel.” The emperor, upon seeing this, commanded them to come out, and was converted to the true God.

Under King Baltasar, Saint Daniel interpreted a mysterious inscription (“Mane, Thekel, Phares”), which had appeared on the wall of the palace during a banquet (Daniel 5:1-31), foretelling the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom. Under the Persian emperor Darius, Saint Daniel was slandered by his enemies, and was thrown into a den with hungry lions, but they did not touch him, and he was not harmed. The emperor Darius then rejoiced over Daniel and ordered people throughout his realm to worship the God of Daniel, “since He is the living and eternal God, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed, and His dominion is forever” (Daniel 6:26).

The holy Prophet Daniel grieved deeply for his people, who then were undergoing righteous chastisement for a multitude of sins and offenses, for transgressing the laws of God, resulting in the grievous Babylonian Captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem: “My God, incline Your ear and hearken; open Your eyes and look upon our desolation and that of Your city, in which Your Name is spoken; for we do not make our supplication before You because of our own righteousness, but because of Your great mercy” (Dan 9:18). Because of Daniel’s righteous life and his prayers for the people’s iniquity, the destiny of the nation of Israel and the fate of all the world was revealed to the holy prophet.

While interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, the holy, glorious Prophet Daniel spoke of a great and final kingdom, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (Dan 2:44). The prophetic vision about the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24-27) speaks about the signs of the First and the Second Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is connected with those events (Daniel 12:1-12).

Saint Daniel interceded for his people before King Cyrus, who esteemed him highly, and who decreed freedom for the Israelite people. Daniel himself and his fellows Ananias, Azarias and Misael, all survived into old age, but died in captivity. According to the testimony of Saint Cyril of Alexandria (June 9), Saints Ananias, Azarias and Misael were beheaded on orders of the Persian emperor Chambyses. (*adapted from oca.org*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11

Brethren, when Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which

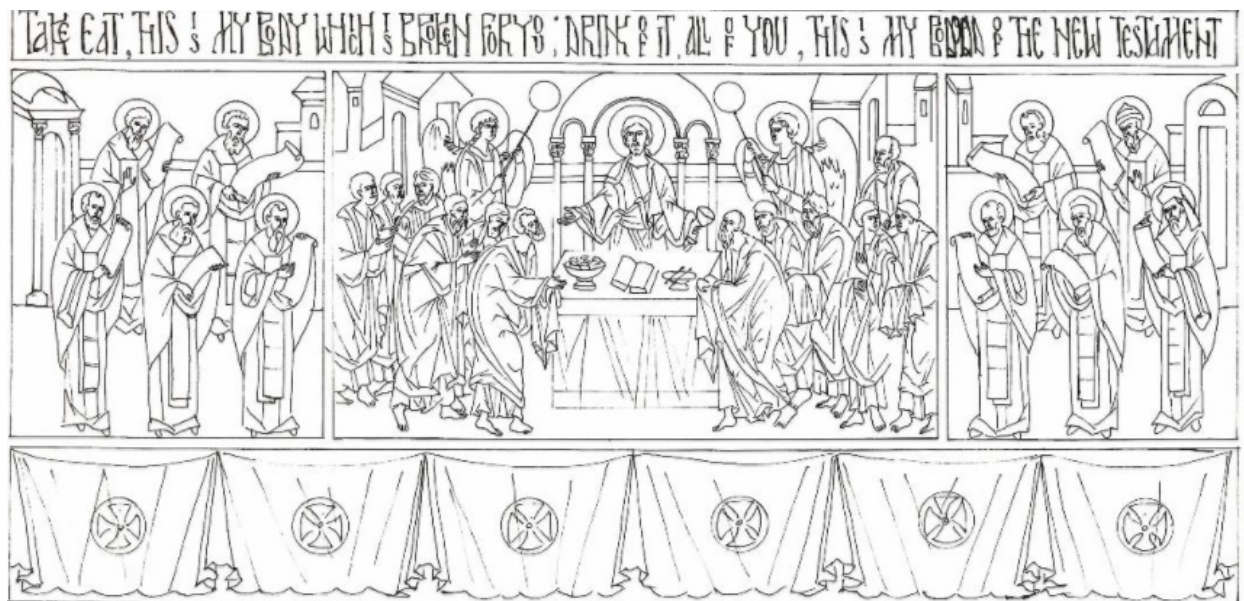
you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 14:16-24

The Lord spoke a parable, saying, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The eye of the listless monk gazes out the windows again and again, and his mind imagines visitors. A sound at the door, and he jumps up. He has heard a voice, and from the window he reconnoiters the scene and won't leave it until he has to sit down from stiffness. When he reads, the listless monk yawns plenty and easily falls into sleep. He rubs his eyes and stretches his arms. His eyes wander from the book. He stares at the wall and then goes back to his reading for a little. He then wastes his time hanging on to the end of words, counts the pages, ascertains how the book is made, finds fault with the writing and the design. Finally he just shuts it and uses it as a pillow. Then he falls into a sleep not too deep, because hunger wakes his soul up and he begins to concern himself with that. The listless monk - he's lazy in prayer, and he never speaks about it. For like a sick person who won't carry a heavy load, so also is the listless monk who does not do the work of God carefully. He ruins the strength of his body, and he un-strings the chords of his soul. Endurance cures listlessness. And so does everything done with much care and fear of God. Set a measure for yourself in everything that you do, and don't turn from it until you've reached that goal. And pray intelligently and with straining, and the spirit of listlessness will flee from you. – Evagrius of Pontus, *On the Eight Spirits of Evil* 14



ARCHANGEL STUNO MICHAEL KABELUCK - 2017

Beauty Will Save the World (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot)

We are moving forward with the next phase of iconography at St. Thomas, which will complete work in the Narthex (the entry of the church) and in the Holy Place (the curved wall in the altar area). Icons of two Seraphim on the ends of the curved walls will cost \$1,700 each. Icons of the ten Bishops flanking the icon of the Heavenly Banquet in front of the altar (either side of the Banquet already in the Holy Place) will cost \$2,000 each. We will also be moving Gorazd of Prague, a Bishop whose icon currently hangs in the Nave, into the Holy Place with an icon of John of Damascus being put in his place, which can be sponsored for \$600. Four new icons will be completed in the nave, for \$750 each. The writing above the icons, as well as the "tablecloth" below will be completed, and costs have been combined with the sponsorship of the Bishops.

The icons will be installed in 2018. The last time we offered this opportunity to glorify God in His church, the response was tremendous. We are ready to collect funds to complete the project, so if you are interested in participating, please contact Josh Moore by phone at (541) 601-8413 or at jgmoore01@gmail.com.

Please see the Church website for up-to-date sponsorship information and pictures of the icon work to be completed. Any donation of \$500 or more is eligible for a memorial plaque in the social hall. **Currently** we have: Pledged/Received Funds: \$11,517 | Remaining Needed: \$14,883.

The Bishops to be placed in the Holy Place are currently planned to be (\$2,000 to sponsor one): Basil the Great, Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyprian of Carthage, Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch (sponsored), and Peter Moghila.

2 Seraphim in the Holy Place (\$1,700 to sponsor; 1 sponsored).

John of Damascus in the nave (\$600 to sponsor)

In the Narthex: Pr. Daniel, David, Elijah, and Melchizedek. (\$750 to sponsor).

Also commemorated today: Venerable Dionysius of Aegina

Saint Dionysius of Zakynthos (shown to the right in the icon on the front page), the Bishop of Aegina was born in 1547 on the island of Zakynthos. Though born into a noble family, he was determined to flee the world and set his mind upon heavenly things. He entered the monastery of Strophada, and after the prescribed time, he was clothed in the angelic schema by the abbot. Though young in years, he surpassed many of his elders in virtue, and was found worthy of ordination to the holy priesthood.

Although he protested his unworthiness, Saint Dionysius was consecrated Bishop of Aegina. In that office he never ceased to teach and admonish his flock, and many were drawn to him in order to profit from his wisdom. He feared the praise of men, lest he should fall into the sin of vainglory, so he resigned his See and returned to Zakynthos.

In 1579 the diocese of Zakynthos was widowed (when a bishop dies, his diocese is described as “widowed”), and Dionysius agreed to care for it until a new bishop could be elected. Then he fled from the worldly life which gave him no peace, and went to the Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos Anaphonitria, twenty miles from the main village.

A certain stranger murdered the saint’s brother Constantine, an illustrious nobleman. Fearing his victim’s relatives, the stranger, by chance or by God’s will, sought refuge in the monastery where Saint Dionysius was the abbot. When the saint asked the fugitive why he was so frightened, he confessed his sin and revealed the name of the man he had murdered, asking to be protected from the family’s vengeance. Saint Dionysius wept for his only brother, as was natural. Then he comforted the murderer and hid him, showing him great compassion and love.

Soon the saint’s relatives came to the monastery with a group of armed men and told him what had happened. He pretended to know nothing about it. After weeping with them and trying to console them, he sent them off in the wrong direction. Then he told the murderer that he was the brother of the man he had killed. He admonished him as a father, and brought him to repentance. After forgiving him, Saint Dionysius brought him down to the shore and helped him to escape to another place in order to save his life. Because of the saint’s Christ-like virtue, he was granted the gift of working miracles.

Having passed his life in holiness, Saint Dionysius reached a great age, then departed to the Lord on December 17, 1624. Not only are the saint's relics incorrupt, but he is also one of Greece's "walking saints" (Saint Gerasimus and Saint Spyridon are the others). He is said to leave his reliquary and walk about performing miracles for those who seek his aid. In fact, the soles of his slippers wear out and must be replaced with a new pair from time to time. The old slippers are cut up, and the pieces are distributed to pilgrims. On August 24, we celebrate the Transfer of his Holy Relics. Through the prayers of Saint Dionysius, may Christ our God have mercy upon us and save us. (*from oca.org*)

IN THE BEGINNING: REFLECTIONS ON THE NATIVITY FAST

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1:1–3)

Unlike our American culture, which celebrates from now until Christmas, with celebrations ending promptly on December 26, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Nativity throughout the year. Our joyful part of the celebration in this season is supposed to be from December 25 through January 7. November 15 through December 24 is a period of fasting and reflective preparation. The focus is neither shopping nor decorating, but meditating on the awesome miracle of the Son of God taking on flesh and becoming one of us. This is why we call the holiday either the Nativity (to commemorate an historical event) or the Incarnation (to recognize the spiritual significance of the Nativity)....

Why did God send His Son to be among us? To answer this question, we go back to "the beginning." In order to believe in God, one has to first believe that God created us—someone greater than us created us. Whether one interprets Genesis 1 as seven literal days or not (most Orthodox theologians affirm that the seven-day creation is an allegory), or whether one believes that God created everything, or that He created the first thing and a chain-reaction of evolutionary outgrowth was the result, the most important verses of Genesis 1 are the first three: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, there was God, there was nothing else but God. And God created everything from nothing. God, however, is not created, but existed from the beginning.

In order to believe in Christ, one has to believe that He too, existed from the beginning. Genesis 1:1–3 reveals all three persons of the Holy Trinity, present and working together for the creation of the world. In the beginning God (the Father) created the heavens and the earth. The Spirit (Holy Spirit) of God was moving

over the face of the waters. And God said (the voice of God is God the Son), “Let there be light.”

After the creation of the Light, God (in Trinity) created the heavens, the earth, the moon, sun, and stars, the plants, and the animals. At every stage of the creation, God looked upon what He created “and saw that it was good. (Gen. 1: 4, 12, 18, 25).”

On the “*sixth day*,” God said “*Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness . . . So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:26–27).” And after creating the man, God looked on what He created and saw that it was VERY good, the only time that this superlative is used in reference to the creation.

God gave man the Garden of Eden, where he lived in a state of Paradise. However, God gave the man free will. He did not force man to live in union with God. He gave him a choice. He told man, “*You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die* (Gen. 2:16).”

But man was not content. Instead of feeling thankfulness for all that God had given to him, man was ungrateful. And tempted to eat from the tree, he did so. And God cast mankind out of Paradise, out from the Garden of Eden. Instead of living in unity with God, the human being now lived in a state of chaos—victim of his own mistakes, victim of the mistakes of others, and victim of a broken creation filled with “natural” (in reality unnatural, because God made nature perfect) disasters, until the day that each human being dies, and returns to the dust from which he was created.

A *wall of separation* separated man from God. In Genesis 3:24, we read, “God drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

God did not abandon His people though. He made a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:13–17) that He would never destroy the earth with a flood again. He made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15) that God would be a Father to Abraham and all of His descendants. The sign of the covenant was circumcision (Gen. 17). God gave deliverance from famine through Joseph (Gen. 41). He gave deliverance to His people, the Israelites, from the oppression of Pharaoh (Exod. 14). God gave order to the people of Israel through the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20). He gave His people judges, kings and prophets in every generation, to let them know that they were not forgotten by Him. Throughout the Old Testament, there are prophecies foretelling of the coming of Christ the Messiah, who will save His

people from their sins. “*But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son to redeem those under the Law* (Gal. 4:4).” This is the Feast of the Nativity. The story of the Nativity is told in Prophecy (Old Testament), the Gospels (New Testament), the Epistles (New Testament), and hymns and prayers (from the liturgical tradition). All will be used on our journey to the Nativity.

As we continue our journey, remember these three things—God made us in His image and likeness; we fell through sin; and through the Incarnation (which begins the earthly ministry of Christ that culminates in His Passion and Resurrection from the dead), we are reunited with Christ, as the Creator comes to live among His creation and redeem us from our sins.

Today’s prayer is a hymn from the Vespers of Christmas, which tells us that through the Nativity the wall of separation between us and God came down.

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, as we tell about this mystery. The middle wall of separation has been broken down; the fiery sword has turned back, the Cherubim permits access to the tree of life; and I partake of the delight of Paradise, from which I was cast out because of disobedience. For the exact Image of the Father, the express Image of His eternity, take the form of a servant, coming forth from a Virgin Mother; and He undergoes no change. He remained what He was, true God; and He took up what He was not, becoming human in His love for humanity. Let us cry out to Him: “You who were born from a Virgin, O God, have mercy on us.” (Trans. Fr. Seraphim Dedes.)

– Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis (*from goarch.org*)

NATIVITY VIGIL ON CHRISTMAS EVE

On Sunday evening at **5:00**, a Nativity Vigil followed by the Liturgy of St. Basil will be held at St. Thomas. Please observe at least a 3 hour fast if you plan to receive the Eucharist.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)