

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 22, 2019 – Sunday Before Nativity (Sunday of the Fathers) | Forefeast of the Nativity | Great-martyr Anastasia, Deliverer from Potions

The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers (or the Sunday of the Genealogy of Christ). On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to Saint Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths.

The Forefeast of the Nativity of the Lord begins on December 20. From now on, most of the liturgical hymns will be concerned with the birth of the Savior.

At Vespers for this third day of the prefeast of the Nativity we sing, “Christ is born on earth to crush the power of evil, to enlighten those in darkness, and to free the captives. Let us go forth to meet Him.”

In other hymns we chant today: "Bethlehem, be adorned; sing, City of Zion; rejoice, O desert, betrothed to joy; for a star comes forth in Bethlehem, announcing

that Christ is about to be born, and a cave receives the Uncontainable, and a manger is being prepared to receive eternal Life." "God is with us will be incarnate, understand contrary nations, and submit yourselves removing yourselves from our lives"; "understand and submit yourselves, for God is with us, who threshes and winnows from the earth every dominion and authority that do not yield to Him." "Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad and let the hosts of angels clearly sing: Glory to God in the highest"; "Come, you born of the earth with angels, and let us form a choir: let us cry out: Glory to God in the highest." "Holding to the law of love, let us take up the goal of brotherly love, being at peace with one another, and of one mind: for Christ, the granter of peace draws near, bringing peace to the universe and saving."

St. Anastasia was born a Roman and was the spouse of a rich pagan Publius. Instructed in the Christian faith by St. Chrysogonus, she devoted herself to ministering to prisoners and confessors of Christ. Traveling from country to country, she comforted the imprisoned Christians, treated their wounds and with the help from her estate released them from prison. For all this she was called Pharmakolytrias, i.e. Medicine woman. She suffered in Illyria, having been attached to 4 pillars and burned by fire. St. Chrysogonus was for a long time kept in a Roman prison and, finally, was beheaded by the sword in Aquileia. St. Theodota, a rich widow from Nicaea, receiving into her home St. Anastasia, together with her three children, one of whom was Evodias, suffered for Christ in Nicaea (see Jul. 29). After torture they were burned. St. Eutychianus and the rest (120 others), who accepted Christ during the torture of St. Anastasia, were beheaded by the sword.

The Great Martyr Anastasia of Sirmium was martyred sometime between 290 and 304, but after her relics were transferred to Constantinople in the fifth century, during the reign of Emperor Leo I, and to Rome in the sixth century, her popularity quickly rose throughout the Christian world. In Constantinople, they were installed in the fourth century Anastasis Church in the Portico of Dominus, near Constantine's forum. In old Rome, they were installed in the fourth century titular basilica of Saint Anastasia, built perhaps by Constantine's sister, Anastasia, to honor either the Resurrection of Christ or the original Roman martyr of the same name. In 824 Theodore Krithinos, oikonomos of the Great Church, traveled to Rome on an embassy to the Pope, and while there discovered an anonymous long Passion narrative of St. Anastasia written in Latin. After translating it to Greek, he brought it to Constantinople, which helped spark a revival in devotion to the Saint. Because of these events, churches throughout the Roman Empire were dedicated to her, and in each were iconographic portrayals of her holding a medicine bottle. Why?

When a saint takes on a particular epithet, there is usually a historical reason for it. With St. Anastasia, the reason she is called "Pharmakolitra" (deliverer from potions or spells; the two were synonymous at the time, but it is best translated as deliverer from poisons) can first of all be attributed to certain miracles recorded in some versions of her Life. For example, in the Milan version, Anastasia, through her prayers, "freed those troubled by unclean spirits". Even more telling is the Palermo version, in which Anastasia is said to have released those under the spell of sorcerers. In the tenth century we have written testimonies of the lives of four saints, two Fools for Christ, Andrew and Basil, along with St. Nephon and St. Irene Chrysovalantou, that make reference to the Church of Saint Anastasia in Constantinople. In the Life of Saint Andrew the Fool, who we are told lived in the fifth century, we are informed that Andrew, who was a slave at the time, began to play the fool in order to imitate the saints whom he admired. His slave master thought that his favorite slave had gone insane, so he brought him to the Church of Saint Anastasia and chained him there along with others of similar condition. It was believed that St. Anastasia would appear in the dreams of the insane and deliver them from either their mental illness or their demonic possession. St. Anastasia appeared to Andrew, but instead of "curing" him, she supported him. Andrew spent four months chained in the Church of Saint Anastasia, and eventually he was released as incurable.

A similar tale is told about St. Nephon, in whose Life we are told that upon falling ill he also incubated in the Church of Saint Anastasia, and he was healed through the prayers of the Theotokos, who appeared in the church attended by St. Anastasia.

In the Life of Saint Basil the Younger we are told two stories. One is of a servant girl of "a certain nun from the Monastery of Mouzalon" who was possessed by an unclean spirit and brought to Basil for healing. She had run away from the Church of Saint Anastasia, and was pursued closely by "attendants of the sick" from the church. The second story is about a highly placed eunuch named John, who had lost his mind due to a spell or poison. When discussing the possibilities for his treatment, his servants conclude: "...let us take him to the revered temple of the all-praiseworthy martyr Anastasia who unbinds spells, and she will overshadow him." Neither patient is actually healed at the church, which is why they eventually resort to St. Basil.

A more dramatic tale is developed in the Life of Saint Irene Chrysovalantou, which further testifies to the power of St. Anastasia to unbind spells and confound sorcerers. One story details that of a possessed nun from Cappadocia, who had left her boyfriend to enter the monastic life. Upon entering the monastic life, her distressed boyfriend goes to a sorcerer who puts the young nun in a spell by which

she becomes possessed and tries to leave the Monastery which was established and headed by St. Irene in Constantinople. She is brought to the Church of Saint Anastasia where an exorcism takes place and is delivered, through the aid of the Theotokos, St. Basil the Great and St. Anastasia. In the second story, a vine-dresser named Nicholas is sent for incubation in the Church of Saint Anastasia, bound with chains and fetters awaiting healing. So grievous is his demonic possession that he even attacks the priest at the end of the Divine Liturgy. In this case, St. Irene eventually drives the demon from the man.

The clear indication from all these tales is that the Church of Saint Anastasia was the place to go during Roman times in Constantinople for cases of demonic possession, mental illness, and deliverance from potions, spells, and poison. It was basically the most popular lunatic asylum of the day, along with a shrine and a hospital. Because of the success of cases involved, she became the patron deserving of the epithet "Pharmakolitra." (*adapted from oca.org, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris), & johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:9-10,17-23,32-40

Brethren, by faith Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better

resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they

shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

By heeding the evil counsel of the pernicious angel, man transgressed the divine commandments, was shown to be unworthy, forfeited the pledge, and interrupted God's plan. God's grace, however, is unalterable and His purpose cannot prove false, so some of man's offspring were chosen, that, from among many, a suitable receptacle for this divine adoption and grace might be found, who would serve God's will perfectly, and would be revealed as a vessel worthy to unite divine and human nature in one person, not just exalting our nature, but restoring the human race. The holy Maid and Virgin Mother of God was this vessel, so she was proclaimed by the Archangel Gabriel as full of grace (Lk. 1:28), being the chosen one among the chosen, blameless, undefiled and worthy to contain the person of the God-Man and to collaborate with Him.... Note where this choice began. The excellent Seth was chosen from among Adam's children, because by his well-ordered conduct, his control over his senses and his glorious virtues he showed himself to be a living heaven and so came to be one of the elect, from whom the Virgin would spring forth, that truly heavenly and divinely appropriate chariot of the supercelestial God, and through whom He would call men back to eternal sonship. Therefore all Seth's stock were called "sons of God" (Gen 6:2), because it was from the race that the Son of God was to become the Son of Man. That is why the name Seth can be interpreted to mean "resurrection", or rather "a raising up from", which really refers to the Lord, who promises and gives eternal life to those who believe in Him.

And how worthy a type of Christ is Seth? "Seth was born to Eve", as she herself says, "instead of Abel" (Gen. 4:25), whom Cain envied and murdered, whereas the Virgin's son, Christ, was born to the human race instead of Adam, whom the prince and father of evil killed out of envy. Seth, however, did not raise up Abel, as he was merely a prefiguration of the resurrection, whereas our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected Adam, for He is the true life and resurrection of mankind (cf. Jn. 11:25), through whom Seth's descendants were deemed worthy, in hope, of divine adoption, being called sons of God. That they were referred to as God's sons on account of this hope, is demonstrated by the first person to be so called and to inherit God's election. This was Seth's son Enos who, as Moses wrote, "was the first to hope to be called by the Lord's name" (Gen. 4:26 LXX).

Do you see clearly that it was through hope that he came to be called? If the Seventy [translators of the Septuagint] say, "He was the first to hope to be called by the Lord's name", they are not at all in disagreement with the others; because Enos lived in a way that pleased God more than anyone else in his day, and was the first to receive this hope from God. He called upon this hope and was called after it. Seth was chosen from God from among Adam's sons, and so Luke, in preparing his genealogy, traces back to him the whole race from which Christ was born according to the flesh. Then Enos was chosen in preference to Seth's other children, as we have said. From his descendants Enoch was chosen, who proved through what happened to him that virtue does not go unrewarded, and that this fleeting world is not worthy of those who are well-pleasing to God, for he was translated because he pleased God (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5).

Lamech was chosen and preferred to Enoch's other descendants, and after him his son, Noah, attained to God's election and became the only father of everyone in the world after the flood. Only he and his entire family were found to live chastely at that time when the sons of God took wives from among the daughters of men, as Moses tells us (Gen. 6:1-2). This means that among the offspring of Seth, the forefather of the Mother of God, those who were rejected as unworthy were swept out of the Virgin Mother's family and completely deprived of the divine Spirit. Later this Spirit came upon the Virgin, according to the angel's words to her: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35). The Spirit also arranged beforehand for the Virgin to come into being, choosing from the beginning, and cleansing, the line of her descent, accepting those who were worthy, or were to become fathers of eminent men, but utterly casting out the unworthy.

See how Noah clearly foreshadows Him who was later to be born of the Virgin, for whose sake the election was made. For Noah was shown to be the savior, not of all the race of men in general, but of his own household, all of whom were saved through him. In the same way Christ, too, is the Savior of the race of men, not of all men in general, but of all His own household, that is of His Church; not, however, of the disobedient. Furthermore, the name Noah can be translated to mean "rest" (Gen. 5:29). But who is true "rest" except the Virgin's Son, who says, "Come unto me through repentance, all you that labor and are heavy laden with sin, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28), bestowing freedom, ease and eternal life upon you.

Lamech, who gave Noah this name, because he saw in him Christ, who was later to come from their stock, and would be the comfort of all God-fearing people down through the ages, clearly prophesied through this name concerning Christ. "He called his name Noah", says the Scripture, "saying, 'This name shall bring us rest

from our works, and from the toils of our hands, and from the earth, which the Lord our God has cursed" (Gen. 5:29 LXX). These words are not about the flood which came to pass, for Lamech's death preceded the flood, yet he says that Noah will "bring us rest", including himself as a partaker in the comfort he foretold. In those days it had not yet come about that in each man "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5) throughout his life, which was why universal destruction of everyone on earth came upon the earth from God. So to whom do his words refer when he says, "He will bring us rest"? He also says, "He shall bring us rest from the earth except Him who opened heaven, raised our nature thither and taught us, through words and deeds, the way up to heaven, calling us towards it? But if the flood too prefigured this rest, it did so by cutting off sins and laying them to rest, not by bringing comfort and ease to sinners.

In this way and for these reasons, Noah attained to God's election. Of his children, Shem was accepted among those chosen to be the blessed family of the Mother of God.... It was from him that Abraham was descended, who was preferred according to God's election above all Shem's offspring and was called to be part of the lineage of the Virgin Mother. He was given a new name by God, and received that great promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed in his seed (Gen. 17:5; 12:3). According to Paul, Christ our God, who was born of the Virgin, is his seed according to the flesh (Gal. 3:16).... From among Abraham's children Isaac was chosen, then Jacob from among his sons, and the tribe of Judah from Jacob's offspring. From this tribe the root of Jesse was selected, and for those who sprang from this root, David the psalmist and prophet and king, of whom God says, "Thy seed shall endure forever, and His throne as the sun before Me; and as the moon that is established forever, and the witness in heaven is faithful" (Ps. 89:36-37 LXX).

Who is this witness? Obviously He who sits upon the heavenly throne, of whom it says elsewhere: "His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in Him" (Ps. 72:17 LXX). From this the lineage of the Mother of God and Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, seems somehow double, for both were of the same tribe and descent according to the law. Thus the family's ancestral line is twofold, made up both of natural children and children according to the law, often converging into one, but sometimes divided into two, so that the same child, strange as it may seem, might be the son of two fathers who are brothers, of the one from a legal point of view, as not having been begotten of him physically, and of the other, according to nature, as having been raised up as seed for his brother (Matt. 22:24; Deut. 25:5; Gen. 38:8); inasmuch as the child traces his ancestry back to David through both his fathers. It is possible to

see the dual nature of this lineage in another respect, because the royal line was united on many occasions and in numerous ways with the priestly one. Thus in the holy ancestral line of the Mother of God, Zerubbabel traces his lineage back to David through the descendants of Nathan, who was counted among the priests, as well as through those of Solomon, who inherited the kingdom. For this reason the Lord's genealogy according to the flesh is drawn up differently by the evangelists Luke and Matthew, because one takes into account natural fathers, the other, fathers according to the law, and one mentions only those of royal descent, whereas Luke brings in those of the Levitical race and those of the royal house, who were bound together by priesthood or marriage. As for Zerubbabel, because he was also favored among the Mother of God's forbears, he too prefigured Christ and was honored with great titles and authority. Born in captivity, he was admired by Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, for his virtue and understanding. He taught both Hebrews and foreigners the power of the truth, set his race free from servitude, and restored God's Temple (1 Esd. 4:33-63; Ezra 3:1-13). Later Christ did something similar, not renewing the inanimate Temple, but that living, rational temple, our nature, and redeeming it, not from perceptible and temporary, but spiritual and primeval captivity.

Zerubbabel was the forefather of both the Virgin and Joseph to whom she was betrothed, but whereas she was the Virgin's forbear by nature alone, he was Joseph's according to nature and the law. For Joseph had two fathers, Heli according to Luke (Lk. 3:23), and Jacob according to Matthew (Matt. 1:16). Heli and Jacob were brothers descended from Zerubbabel, and when Heli died without children, Jacob fathered a child, Joseph, by his brother's wife, who according to the law belongs to Heli.

Now these things are examples and types of greater mysteries, since it was necessary that the royal line be united in many ways, with the priestly race, which would bring forth the family of Christ according to the flesh; because in many ways Christ is truly the eternal King and High Priest. And the fact that adopted sons are counted as sons, that the law approves of adoptive fathers no less and sometimes more than natural fathers, and that the same, appropriately, applies to other kinds of kinship, was a clear example and type of our adoption by Christ, our kinship with Him and our calling according to the Spirit and the law of grace. For the Lord Himself says in the Gospels, "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:50). May we all attain to this, to the glory of Christ and of His Father without beginning and of the life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 57*

Service Schedule for This Week

On **Tuesday morning at 7**, we will serve Royal Hours for Nativity. On **Tuesday evening at 6**, we will celebrate the Nativity of our Lord with a vigil followed by Divine Liturgy. Please observe at least a 3 hour fast if you plan to receive the Eucharist (note, however, that traditionally no food is eaten on Christmas Eve until the first star appears in the sky). We will not have our usual morning prayers on Wednesday or Friday.

Social Team for December 29

Team 6 is up next week – Tucker, Blaydoe M., Wright RC. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan 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, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, Santiago Alzugaray, 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, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam 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, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectarios 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.)