

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: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.**

January 03, 2021 | Sunday Before Theophany Holy Prophet Malachi

Having celebrated the Birth of the Lord on December 25th, and the Circumcision of the Lord eight days later on January 1st, the Church is now preparing us to celebrate on January 6th the Holy Theophany, when the Holy Trinity manifested themselves at the Baptism of our Lord at the Jordan River. To prepare us for this event, the Holy Prophet Malachi has been installed for commemoration on January 3rd. But why the Prophet Malachi?

The Prophet Malachi, who lived about 400 years before Christ, is considered the last of the so-called Minor Prophets, minor for the size of his Old Testament book and not his prophetic status. After him there was no prophet in Israel until the coming of the Forerunner and Baptist John. As the last Prophet and Book of the Old Testament, we are left through him two prophecies which tell us that the Lord Himself is coming to the people of Israel, and before He does so He will send a



Messenger (or Angel) to prepare the way for Him. This Messenger is none other than Saint John the Forerunner, who baptized the Lord in the Jordan River.

In Malachi 3:1 we read the first prophecy of the coming of this Messenger: *"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.*

The second prophecy is contained in the very last verses of the same book (4:5-6): *"Behold, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."*

In Luke 1:17 the Angel Gabriel tells us that this Prophet Elijah is none other than John the Baptist: *"And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous. to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

This is further clearly stated by our Lord in Matthew 11:13-14: *"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."*

The Prophet Malachi, as the last of the Old Testament prophets before John the Forerunner, foretold the coming of the "Messenger" and "Prophet Elijah" who was to prepare the way for the manifestation of the Lord among the people of Israel, and for this reason the Church celebrates him on January 3rd, a few days before we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord on January 6th. It is a commemoration of preparation.

Because Malachi's name does not occur elsewhere in Scripture, some doubt whether "Malachi" is intended to be the personal name of the prophet. None of the other prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible or the Greek Old Testament are anonymous. The form *mal'akhi*, signifies "my messenger"; it occurs in Malachi 3:1 (compare to Malachi 2:7). But this form of itself would hardly be appropriate as a proper name without some additional syllable such as *Yah*, whence *mal'akhiah*, i.e. "messenger of Elohim." Haggai, in fact, is expressly designated "messenger of Elohim" (Haggai 1:13). Besides, the superscriptions prefixed to the book, in both the Septuagint and the Vulgate, warrant the supposition that Malachi's full name ended with the syllable *-yah*. At the same time the Greek Old Testament translates the last clause of Malachi 1:1, "by the hand of his messenger," and the Targum reads, "by the hand of my angel, whose name is called Ezra the scribe." Saint Jerome suggests this may be because Ezra is seen as an intermediary between the prophets and the "great synagogue." In *On the Death of the Prophets*, we read that

"because of his beauty he was surnamed Angel." According to Saint Nikolai Velimirovich, "According to legend, the people called him an angel, perhaps because of his external beauty or because of his spiritual purity, or even, perhaps because of his association with an angel of God. On many occasions he spoke face to face with an angel. When this occurred, others heard the voice of an angel; but they were not worthy to see the face of the angel. That which the angel proclaimed, the young Malachi prophesied."

Malachi prophesied during the Persian period, and after the reconstruction and dedication of the second Temple in 516 BC. More specifically, Malachi probably lived and labored during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, and some even identify him as being either Ezra or Nehemiah. The abuses which Malachi mentions in his writings correspond so exactly with those which Nehemiah found on his second visit to Jerusalem in 432 BC (Nehemiah 13:7) that it seems reasonably certain that he prophesied shortly before that date, i.e. between 445 and 432 BC.

The Book of Malachi was written to correct the lax religious and social behavior of the Israelites - particularly the priests - in post-exilic Jerusalem. Although the prophets urged the people of Judah and Israel to see their exile as punishment for failing to uphold their covenant with Elohim, it was not long after they had been restored to the land and to Temple worship that the people's commitment to their God began, once again, to wane. It was in this context that the prophet commonly referred to as Malachi delivered his prophecy.

In 1:2, Malachi has the people of Israel question God's love for them. This introduction to the book illustrates the severity of the situation which Malachi addresses. The graveness of the situation is also indicated by the dialectical style with which Malachi confronts his audience. Malachi proceeds to accuse his audience of failing to respect God as God deserves. One way in which this disrespect is made manifest is through the substandard sacrifices which Malachi claims are being offered by the priests. While Elohim demands animals that are "without blemish" (Leviticus 1:3), the priests, who were "to determine whether the animal was acceptable," were offering blind, lame and sick animals for sacrifice because they thought nobody would notice. In 2:10, Malachi addresses the issue of divorce. On this topic, Malachi deals with divorce both as a social problem ("Why then are we faithless to one another ... ?" 2:10) and as a religious problem ("Judah ... has married the daughter of a foreign god" 2:11). Malachi urges each to remain steadfast to the wife of his youth.

Malachi also criticizes his audience for questioning God's justice. He reminds them that God is just, exhorting them to be faithful as they await that justice. Malachi quickly goes on to point out that the people have not been faithful. In fact, the

people are not giving God all that God deserves. Just as the priests have been offering unacceptable sacrifices, so the people have been neglecting to offer their full tithe to Elohim. The result of these shortcomings is that the people come to believe that no good comes out of serving God.

Mainly, he is the prophet of the Dreadful Judgment. "Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day" (Malachi 3: 23-24). Malachi assures the faithful among his audience that in the eschaton, the differences between those who served God faithfully and those who did not will become clear.

The book concludes by calling upon the teachings of Moses ("Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" 4:4) and by promising that Elijah will return prior to the Day of Elohim. Thus nearly five hundred years before Christ, Malachi clearly prophesied the coming and the mission of Saint John the Baptist and Forerunner of the Lord: "Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1). This interpretation of the identity of Elijah with John the Forerunner is confirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13). In Luke 1:17, we learn that the Angel Gabriel told Zechariah, John's father, that John would fulfill Malachi 4:6, stating that he would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah." Following Malachi, it is believed there were no more prophets in Israel until John the Forerunner. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 4:5-8

My son Timothy, be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'" John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Repentance is the beginning, middle and end of the Christian way of life, so it is both sought and required before holy baptism, in holy baptism, and after holy baptism. We are asked to express our repentance in words at the time of our baptism, when we are questioned about our good conscience towards God, make a covenant with Him and promise to live a God-pleasing life that bears witness to our love for Him. For, having believed, we promise allegiance to Christ, who is good and surpasses all goodness, renouncing the evil and thoroughly depraved enemy, and we take it upon ourselves to hold with all our strength to God's commandments, which bring about what is good, and to abstain from every evil thought and deed. When asked, we reply, either in person or, as happens in the case of infants being baptized, through our godparents, concerning what we have believed, inwardly accepted and agreed to with our minds. And since, according to the apostle, "With the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10), when we make this good confession with our mouth we receive salvation through the washing of regeneration....

As repentance is the beginning and end of the Christian way of life, the Lord's Forerunner and Baptist, who was himself the starting point of this approach to living, preached saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2). And the Lord Himself, the perfection of all goodness, said the same in His preaching. Repentance means hating sin and loving virtue, turning away from evil and doing good. These acts are preceded, however, by condemning ourselves for our faults, being penitent before God, fleeing to Him for refuge with a contrite heart, and casting ourselves into the ocean of His mercy, considering ourselves unworthy to be counted among His sons. As the prodigal son said when he repented, "Lord, I am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants."

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 59.1,9*

Also Commemorated Today: Martyr Gordius

Saint Gordius, a native of Ceasarea in Cappadocia, was a centurion in the Roman army during the reign of Licinius (308-324), and upon seeing the cruelties inflicted on the Christians by the Greek pagans and hearing their blasphemies against Christ, he removed himself from the army and distanced himself from the city. He withdrew to a mountain, and there lived with the wild beasts and irrational animals. Here he lived in quietude as an anchorite praying and fasting, and in return Christ filled him with longing and eros. Strengthened by God and receiving courage to

face the errors of the Greeks, he left the wilderness and entered the city once again, this time as a strong lion (cf. Prov. 28:1) ready to face the Governor who became known for his fierce cruelty against Christians.

In the city there was a festival in honor of the god of war Ares, and the whole population of Ceasarea gathered in the theater to witness the games and horse races. Gordius entered the theater at this time in the year 314, with his wild and savage look from his long sojourn in the wilderness, having a long beard, filthy clothes, squalid hair, hardened body, and carrying a stick fitted with a pouch, yet full of grace he began to openly preach Christ. Because of how he looked, everyone turned their ears to him and listened to him. The Governor of the city was amazed by his boldness, and became enraged when he inquired and learned of his former rank. For this reason he ordered the execution of the Saint, having failed to persuade him with threats and flatteries to deny Christ. Friends and relatives also tried to persuade the Saint to save his life by denying Christ, but he refused to listen, informing them that it would be foolish to add to earthly life and be deprived of eternal life if he was to heed their advice. Therefore the whole city went out to the execution site, and after the Martyr fortified himself with the sign of the Cross, he gave himself to beheading, and through this received the crown of martyrdom.

A portion of his holy relics can be venerated today in the Holy Monastery of Saint Panteleimon at the Holy Mountain, and Saint Basil the Great preached an encomium in his honor on the day of his festival a few decades after his martyric contest. It seems that the date of his festival at that time was March 2nd, but later the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* assigned his feast for January 3rd.

Saint Basil writes the following beautiful words about the withdrawal of Saint Gordius into the wilderness and his emerging in the city armed for the contest:

"He considered life with wild beasts to be more civilized than mixing with idol-worshippers, in the manner of the zealot Elias, who, when he saw that idol-worship was prevailing over Sidon, ran off to Mount Horeb and lived in a cave, seeking out God until he saw the object of his desire - as much as it is possible for a human being to see (cf. 1 Kings 19:1-18). So Gordius was like that too, turning his back on political turmoils, the crowd in the marketplace, the vanity of magistrates, the law courts, the back-biters, the vendors, the buyers, the swearers, the liars, the foul language, the frivolous talk, all the rest, which like burdensome appendages, populous cities drag after them. Purifying his ears, purifying his eyes, and above all having purified his heart, so that he would be able to see God and become blessed, he saw through revelations, he learnt the mysteries, not from human beings nor through

human beings but because he had the Spirit of truth as his great teacher. This is why, when he reflected on how unprofitable and vain life was, how it was more feeble than every dream and shadow, he was aroused more keenly to the desire of the heavenly calling. And he was like an athlete, realizing that he was sufficiently trained and oiled for the contest by means of fasting, vigils, prayers, the continuous and incessant meditation of the sayings of the Spirit, with his eyes fixed on that day on which the entire city in a body, celebrating a feast in honor of a demon who is fond of war, occupied the theater to view a horse race."

According to the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, two saints associated with the military were commemorated on January 3rd in the Eastern Roman Empire - St. Theagenes of Parium and St. Gordius of Caesarea in Cappadocia. St. Theagenes of Parium is described as a Bishop who was being held in prison for refusing to enter into military service, since he considered himself to be a servant and soldier of Christ. St. Gordius of Caesarea was a centurion, who abandoned his office because as a Christian he could no longer endure to hear the name of Christ blasphemed, and became a hermit outside the city. Both are said to have lived under Emperor Licinius in the early fourth century and were martyred. Both are also described as having rejected earthly military service to serve as a soldier of God instead. Why were both Saints commemorated on January 3rd?

One possible answer may have its source in the so-called *Feriale Duranum*, a fragmentary papyrus copy of the official Roman military religious calendar, which was discovered among the records of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* at Dura Europus, and dates to the period c.223/7 A.D. It includes the following description of the ritual to be observed on 3 January:

January 3. Because vows are paid and undertaken both for the welfare of our Lord Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Augustus and for the eternity of the empire of the Roman nation, [to Jupiter Optimus Maximus an ox, to Juno Regina a cow, to Minerva a cow, to Jupiter Victor] an ox, [to Juno Sospes? a cow, --- to Mars Pater a bull, to Mars Victor] a bull, to Victoria a cow.

This is generally identified now as the occasion of the annual renewal by the soldiers of their oath of allegiance to the emperor, the sacramentum which each conscript took at the end of his probationary period before he was posted to his final unit. It was of this oath that Tertullian famously wrote:

Incompatible are the human oath of allegiance and the divine sacrament, the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the legions of the light and the legions of the darkness. One soul cannot serve two lords: God and Caesar.

The Christian emperors of the fourth century retained the oath of allegiance, but in a Christianized form which made it clear that allegiance to the emperor was second to one's allegiance to God, which clarification must have disarmed the objections of many to the oath itself. If this oath continued to be renewed on 3 January, and there is no reason to think that this was not the case, then the decision by the author of the Passion of Saint Theagenes to date the death of Saint Theagenes to 3 January would seem particularly appropriate in the case of a martyr who was alleged to have rejected earthly military service for the service of God. So the choice of this date represents a continuation of the theme of the Passion itself, the need to choose between God and Caesar, essentially making it a pacifist text. No servant of the state could read of Saints Theagenes and Gordius and fail to marvel that they had been executed for their rejection of military service on the very day that soldiers were accustomed to renew their oath of allegiance. It was a direct challenge, in fact, to all Christians in the military, or at least the more pious individuals who had attended a church-service earlier that day, not to proceed with the renewal of their oath of allegiance, but to take the opportunity offered them and reject earthly service for that of the divine king. Or perhaps it merely spoke only of not being in military service under a non-Christian ruler in a non-Christian environment.

Today, while Saint Gordius is still commemorated in the Orthodox Church on January 3, the feast of Saint Theagenes was moved to the day before, on January 2, for unknown reasons. The Synaxarion of Constantinople has him listed under January 3, but the edition of Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite has him commemorated on January 2. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Fifth Issue of SPF50 NOW AVAILABLE!!

Scripture – Prayer - Family



Thank you to all our families who have participated in the SPF50 Ministry. Together we have completed 4 of the SPF50 publications!!

The fifth edition of SPF50 is now available. The reading schedule will begin on **January 10, 2021.**

We are excited for the NEW reading program in the fifth edition!! The NEW reading program will highlight many **ESSENTIAL Biblical Stories** like

Creation, Noah and the Ark, the Exodus, the call of the Prophet Samuel, and many others throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In addition, in order to support families and parishes engaged in the SPF50 Ministry, we will be hosting an **online event for parents** across the Diocese on

Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 6:30pm. The online event is being offered to support and encourage us as we make prayer and Scripture reading a part of our family's life of faith at home. Join other parents around the Diocese as we simply talk with one another and share our experiences with each other. The online event is free-of-charge. You can sign up for the event at the following link: [SPF50 Parents Event](#). Signing up is quick and easy.

If you haven't joined SPF50 yet, the new year is a great time to start! Make a commitment to reading Scripture and praying together with your family. Even the busiest of families can make a commitment to read from the Bible and pray together for 50 minutes a month. Don't forget to fill out the Commitment Card which is available in the SPF50 Section of the Diocesan Website, and then return the Card to your parish priest.

To access this material or to find out more about how SPF50 can help your family grow in Christ, visit the Diocesan Website at acrod.org and look for the SPF50 logo.

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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 & Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbytera Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke & Marlana Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Howl family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl & family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, Luke & Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Nicholas Pavlik, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore & Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Joe & Darlene Waters, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros & Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)