

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesday: Moleben to the
Theotokos 6 AM**

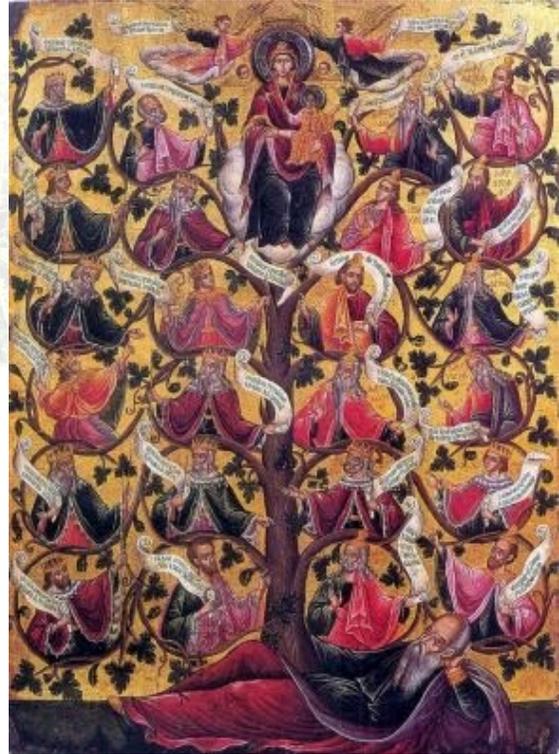
Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



December 19, 2021 – Sunday Before Nativity | Martyr Boniface at Tarsus in Cilicia, and Righteous Aglaida of Rome

On the Sunday that occurs on or immediately after the eighteenth of December, we celebrate all those who from ages past have been well-pleasing to God, beginning from Adam even unto Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, according to genealogy, as the Evangelist Luke has recorded historically (Luke 3:23-38) as well as the Evangelist Matthew (Matthew 1:1-17); we also commemorate the Prophets and Prophetesses, and especially the Prophet Daniel and the Holy Three Children.

Commemoration of Adam and Eve, the first-formed. - I hymn the death of the founders of our living race, the cause for which I both live and die.

Commemoration of the just Abel, Adam's son. - Your blood and soul apart cry out to God, O first of the dead, and first of the saved.

Commemoration of the just Seth, Adam's son. - Seth the new offspring for his parents in Abel's place, a just man too, as Abel was.

Commemoration of the just Enosh, Seth's son. - Many were inspired with zeal in hope, seeing Enosh great in hope.

Commemoration of the just Canaan, Enosh's son. - Canaan was written of in Moses' book, so in the present book must he be written.

Commemoration of Mahalalel, Canaan's son. - To you Mahalalel belongs the word, Son of Canaan, without mentioning the word.

Commemoration of Jared, Mahalalel's son. - Truly you are just among the multitude of the just, and the just Jared we also commemorate.

Commemoration of the just Enoch, Jared's son. - Enoch who had pleased God most visibly, in lands invisible was made to dwell.

Commemoration of Methuselah, Enoch's son. - That you were Enoch's child I learned, Methuselah, And here for others wrote it down.

Commemoration of Lamech, Methuselah's son. - Knowing two Lamechs I must honor one, Not the murderer but the other one named Lamech.

Commemoration of the just Noah, Lamech's son. - Adam brought mortals ruin from a tree, But Noah through a tree saved all the race.

Commemoration of the just Shem, Noah's son. - His father's nakedness Shem rightly covered, Finding that he had his father's prayers as cover....

Commemoration of the just Eber, after whom the Jews are named Hebrews. - Eber is truly great for all the Jews; He gave his own name to the Hebrew race....

Commemoration of the just Patriarch Abraham. - How shall I welcome Abraham with words, To whom it was vouchsafed to welcome Angels?

Commemoration of the just Sarah, Abraham's wife. - A barren nature by God's will o'erthrown, A child is witness too of Sarah's pains.

Commemoration of the Patriarch Isaac, Abraham's son. - Bound for the slaughter Isaac was a type Of God's high Word who would to slaughter come.

Commemoration of the just Rebecca, Isaac's wife. - Noblest of husbands found to share his bed Rebecca, who was noblest of wives.

Commemoration of the Patriarch Jacob, Isaac's son. - By the Ladder which is the Virgin Jacob saw, God coming down to earth before His birth.

Commemoration of the just Leah, Jacob's first wife. - The Lord did not make Leah fair of face, But gave her womb the gift of motherhood.

Commemoration of the Patriarch Judah, Jacob's son, of whose tribe came the Christ. - Those who are saved will now sing Judah's praise, For Christ who is salvation came from him....

Commemoration of Boaz, Salmon's son. - Evangelist, whom do you write as son Of Salmon here? Boaz, he says, I write.

Commemoration of the just Ruth. - Leaving her nation and her gods behind, The Nation and God of Moses Ruth then found.

Commemoration of Obed, Boaz' son, born of Ruth. - Obed of Ruth, a Moabite by tribe, But yet of Boaz, a true Israelite.

Commemoration of Jesse, Obed's son. - Jesse give birth, and let your race give birth Until from it a Child, great God, is born.

Commemoration of King David, Jesse's son. - What shall I say, the Lord bears witness here, I have found David after my own heart....

Commemoration of Joseph, the Betrothed, Jacob's son. - To Joseph, the Betrothed, the Spirit shows That his betrothed, before they wed, conceives.

Through their holy prayers, O God, have mercy and save us. Amen. *(from the synaxarion for the Sunday before Nativity, translated by John Sanidopoulos)*

The Holy Martyr Boniface was the slave of a rich young Roman woman named Aglaida (Aglae) and he dwelt with her in an iniquitous cohabitation. But they both felt the sting of conscience and they wanted somehow to be cleansed of their sin. And the Lord granted them the possibility to wash away their sin with their blood and to finish their life in repentance.

Aglaida learned that whoever keeps relics of the holy martyrs in the home and venerates them receives great help in gaining salvation. Under their influence, sin is diminished and virtue prevails. She arranged for Boniface to go to the East, where there was a fierce persecution against Christians, and she asked him to bring back the relics of some martyr, who would become a guide and protector for them.

As he was leaving, Boniface laughed and asked, "My lady, if I do not find any relics, and if I myself suffer for Christ, will you accept my body with reverence?" Aglaida scolded him, saying that he was setting off on a sacred mission, but he was not taking it seriously. Boniface pondered her words, and during the whole journey he thought that he was unworthy of touching the bodies of the martyrs.

Arriving at Tarsus in Cilicia, Boniface left his companions at the inn and proceeded to the city square, where they were torturing Christians. Struck by the beastly horrible torments, and seeing the faces of the holy martyrs radiant with the grace of the Lord, Boniface marveled at their courage. He embraced them and kissed their feet, asking them to pray that he might be found worthy to suffer with them.

The judge asked Boniface who he was. He replied, "I am a Christian," and then refused to offer sacrifice to idols. They stripped him and hung him upside down, beating him so hard that the flesh fell from his body, exposing the bone. They stuck needles under his nails, and finally they poured molten tin down his throat, but by the power of the Lord he remained unharmed. The people who witnessed this miracle shouted, "Great is the God of the Christians!" Then they began to throw stones at the judge, and then they headed for the pagan temple, in order to cast down the idols.

On the following morning, when things had quieted down somewhat, the judge directed that the holy martyr be thrown into a cauldron of boiling tar, but this also caused the sufferer no harm. An angel came down from Heaven and bedewed him as he stepped into the cauldron. The tar overflowed the cauldron, splattering and burning the torturers themselves. Saint Boniface was then sentenced to beheading by the sword. Blood and a milky fluid flowed from his wounds. Beholding such a miracle, about 550 men believed in Christ.

Saint Boniface's companions, waiting for two days at the inn for him in vain, began searching for him, thinking that he had gotten drunk somewhere. At first their search was without success, but finally they came across a man who had been an eyewitness to the martyr's death. The man also led them to the place where the decapitated body lay. Saint Boniface's companions tearfully begged his forgiveness for their unseemly thoughts about him. After they ransomed the martyr's remains, they brought them back to Rome.

On the eve of their arrival an angel appeared to Aglaida in her sleep and told her to prepare herself to receive her former slave, now the brother and fellow-servant of the angels. Aglaida summoned the clergy, and she received the holy relics with great reverence. Then she built a church on the site of his grave and dedicated it to the holy martyr. There she enshrined his relics, glorified by numerous miracles. After distributing all her wealth to the poor, she withdrew to a monastery, where she spent fifteen years in repentance, then fell asleep in the Lord. She was buried beside Saint Boniface. The sins of the one were washed away by his blood, the other was purified by her tears and asceticism. Both were found worthy to appear unsullied before our Lord Jesus Christ, Who desires not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his wickedness and live (Ezek. 33:11). *(from oca.org)*

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, from David until the captivity in Babylon *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

We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ. For several days before the feast, the holy Church will celebrate this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services. These hymns remind us of our divine birthright, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance of our common spiritual kinship and of the spirit of love and care for one another.

In order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension, not in a worldly, but in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following: Why did God become man while remaining God? And what does God's incarnation require of us?

Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first one with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: God became man to save His people from their sin. (Mt 1:21). For this reason He is called Jesus, which means Savior. And so, it was for our salvation that the Lord came to earth and

became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were the children of wrath and eternal damnation. In the words of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian: that we should be called the sons of God (1 Jn 3:1); Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god. (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the terrible throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters; He gave us a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (Gal 4:6) writes the Apostle.

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the whole world which lies in evil and wickedness (1 Jn 5:19), not for earthly corruption. We must live for an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet 1:4), and for which the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. (Isa 7:14).

You who are preparing yourselves to meet the feast of Christ's Nativity, ask yourselves: Have you preserved that spiritual birth from God which we each received in baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised ugly, evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him Who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; our decisions cannot be only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and with our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast.

Then the feast will become profitable for our soul's salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of lawlessness, as so often happens.

Having resolved the first question on "why did God become man?", we came also to the resolution of the second: What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God, and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed. The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love that God has towards us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of God? How can we not help one another in every way possible, when the Son of God Himself came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). Like the wise men, let us, brothers, also prepare gifts for the new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen. – St. John of Kronstadt, *The Nativity Of Christ: The Feast Of Renewal*

Social Team for December 26

Team 6 is up next week – Cooper, M. Blaydoe, Corson, Fenwick. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Sandy Tucker, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)