

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM**

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**

**December 18, 2022 – Sunday Before Nativity**



Last week, we commemorated the ancestors of Christ which helps us to understand the earthly lineage from which Christ came and through which it was prophesied that He would come. Today, they are included along with those others who have found favor in the eyes of the Lord, showing that grace overflows the bounds of the lineage of the Messiah to engulf not only the Jews but the Gentiles also. Soon that grace will flood the earth, and we will hear the angels speak to the shepherds, and say, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all* people (Luke 2.10) and understand that the love of God was and is, not only for Christ’s ancestors or the righteous of the Old Testament, but for all people.

In the Scripture readings we heard today, we listened to the genealogy of Christ traced not back to Adam and Eve, as it is in Luke’s Gospel (3.23-37), but back to Abraham.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we heard of Moses and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of the wondrous deeds that they performed – the hiding of baby Moses in a basket on the Nile, the offering up of Isaac by Abraham, fire quenched, the dead raised, the martyrdoms by stoning, sawing, and sword; the destitution, the wandering. What is more significant than these events themselves is that they

occurred, and were endured, through the faith of the individuals involved. The faith of the parents of Moses, allowed them to hide their son from a murderous Pharaoh believing that God would protect him. By faith, Abraham sojourned in a strange country, looking for that city where the foundation and the building are wrought by God. By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac, his only child of the promise, because He knew that God was able to raise him from the dead. It is by faith that the things which are hoped for are obtained despite destitution, despite torture, despite lions, fire, the sword, mockings, scourgings, bonds, imprisonment. Despite not having received the promise, yet by faith, they obtained a “good report” (vs. 2 and 39), that is, the life they lived by faith was a commendable life.

The True Israel is the Offspring of Abraham who Imitates the Virtues of Abraham. The significance of these two passages of Scripture read today is that from the God-seer Moses forward, the people of God were not a particular race of people, but those who shared a common faith and lived similarly virtuous lives. We find this not only in the Epistle to the Hebrews but in the Apostle’s *Epistle to the Romans*. Herein, Paul, responds to the accusation that God has not kept His promise. For the Jews were saying that God raised up Israel, only to desert them and replace them by a people who never knew God (cf. 9.6). Paul reorients his listeners to the promise that was given by God beginning with the Patriarch Jacob, saying, “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. The Apostle Paul refers to the Patriarch Jacob as “Israel,” and for a significant reason, notes St. John Chrysostom. Using the name Israel, he writes, is a sign of the virtue of this just man. For the children of Abraham, the “children of the promise,” were never the children by birth. “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children” writes the Apostle Paul (Rom. 9.7f).

If the promise was to come to the seed of Abraham (physically), why was Ishmael not a child of the promise, for was Abraham not his father? Why was not Esau, for he had Isaac and Rebekah for his parents and Jacob as his twin? Instead, as the Apostle Paul continues, “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”(Rom. 9.8).

When the promise which came to Abraham that said, “To you and to your seed I will give the land,” and “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12.7,3) it was not to the offspring of Abraham that this promise came. This is what Christ not only implies but asserts when He says to the Pharisees who say to Christ that Abraham is their father. Christ responds not by contradicting their ancestry but by speaking spiritually to them, and not about human relations, when He says, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham”

(John 8.39). Instead, Christ says to them that they are the children of the Devil, because they do the works of the Devil, because they murder and listen to lies (John 8.44).

St. Justin Martyr writing in the second century, says, “For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ.”

The true Israel are not the children by blood, but the children of Abraham through the bloodline of virtues, who do the “works of Abraham,” as Christ describes in John’s Gospel (8.39). Moreover, St. John Chrysostom writes, “You see how this happens not in Abraham’s case only, but also in that of his son himself, and how it is faith and virtue in all cases that is conspicuous and gives the real relationship character.” For “noble birth after the flesh is of no avail, but we must seek for virtue of soul...”

Being a child of Abraham does not depend on being a Jew or a Gentile. As the Lord did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, so may we understand that the Church of the New Testament is the continuation of Old Testament Israel, and as Baptism is the doorway and entrance into the Church, yet this does not secure God’s favor if we do not strive to keep the commandments of Christ. The fifth-century monk, St. Mark the Ascetic, writes, “Grace has been given mystically to those who have been baptized into Christ, and it becomes active within them to the extent that they actively observe the commandments. Grace never ceases to help us secretly; but to do good – as far as lies in our power – depends on us.”

While we receive the “good news” that is for all people and not only for some, this increases our responsibility to struggle to become worthy of the gift that we have received, to run the race now set before us and not through laziness lag behind, to arm ourselves for the spiritual battle which rages all around and not to be negligent.

Moreover, may we attend to the end and goal of all this work and not forget that it is all directed towards Christ. Where does virtue for its own sake get us? What kind of fruit can it bring unless we are striving to become that which God had originally intended us to be? We reap the fruit of the unwise virgins who, not having enough oil in their lamps, went looking for more and were locked out of the bridal chamber. What they lacked is the life lived for Christ.

St. Silouan, interpreting the asceticism of St. Anthony the Great, writes, “reclusion and desert life and every other form of asceticism will continue to be fruitless because the essence of our life is not arbitrary asceticism but obedience to the Divine will” which becomes manifest in humility and is directed towards the love of God.

Like those Pharisees who appealed to Abraham as their biological ancestor and therefore sought to justify themselves, so also do “we love to glorify the saints, but we do not want to emulate them,” says St. Seraphim of Sarov. Even if we cannot imitate their lives, we can strive to imitate their virtues. How easy it is to become complacent, lazy, and discouraged, especially when we hear of such great saints, the likes of which St. Seraphim was. How can one compare to him, or to those saints of our own day such as Paisios of the Holy Mountain (1924-1994), Iakovos of Evia (1920-1991), Joseph the Hesychast (1897-1959), Ieronymos of Simona Petra (1871-1957), Sophrony of Essex (1896-1993), and Ephraim of Katounakia (1912-1998)? Nevertheless, we need not compare ourselves to them. They did not become saints in one day; yet they can light the fire of zeal within us for it is in their lives where we see “the great, the good, and the virtuous” which we easily forget when we look around us. However, what will injure us the most in struggling to live a life for Christ is to seek out comfort. This does not mean that one should seek out such ascetic feats so as to cripple oneself, seeing in this the way of God. Instead, the hope of comfort, is what hampers the spiritual life. St. Isaac the Syrian writes,

Unless [men] resolve in their minds to suffer hardships, not even those who are found in this present world in the life of the flesh can attain the end of their desire. And since experience testifies to this, there is no need to prove it with words. For in every generation of those who have gone before us, even until now, it is this and nothing else that has made men feeble, so that they do not gain victories and are hindered from excellent deeds.

Moreover, when we look for comfort, instead may we look to Christ; who made himself nothing and became obedient even unto death; look to Christ who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross; look to Christ, who was born in a manger.

In Christ is the good news, not for the Jews only but for all people. Therefore, may we strive to be worthy of being called sons and daughters of God, true children of Abraham in whom the bloodline of faith and the virtues exist.

THROUGH THE PRAYERS OF OUR HOLY FATHERS, LORD JESUS CHRIST, HAVE MERCY ON US. AMEN. (*adapted from holycross.org*)

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

Brethren, by faith, Abraham lived as an alien in the land of the promise, as in a land that was not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise. Indeed, he looked for the city which has foundations and whose architect and builder is God. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac in sacrifice. Yes, he who had joyfully received the promises was now offering up his uniquely loved son, the very one of whom it was

said, “In Isaac will your seed be called.” Abraham concluded that God was even able to raise up the dead and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead. By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding future events. By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each one of Joseph’s sons and bowed down, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, made mention of the exodus of the children of Israel and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that he was a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment. What more shall I say? Time would fail me if I mentioned Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith, they overpowered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became strong in weakness, grew mighty in war and caused foreign armies to flee. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, by chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, I they were sawn apart, they were tempted and they were slain with the sword. They went around in sheep and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted and ill-treated. And yet the world was not worthy of them! They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth. All of them received a testimony through their faith but they did not receive the promise because God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection apart from us.

### **Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 1:1-25 EOB**

The book of the origins of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron. Hezron became the father of Ram. Ram became the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon. Nahshon became the father of Salmon. Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse. Jesse became the father of King David. David became the father of Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam became the father of Abijah. Abijah became the father of Asa. Asa became the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat became the father of Joram. Joram became the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham. Jotham became the father of Ahaz. Ahaz became the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh. Manasseh became the father of Amon. Amon became the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his

brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel became the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim. Eliakim became the father of Azor. Azor became the father of Sadoc. Sadoc became the father of Achim. Achim became the father of Eliud. Eliud became the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan. Matthan became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. And so, all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Christ, fourteen generations. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ happened like this: after his mother, Mary, was promised in marriage to Joseph but before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her betrothed, who was a righteous man did not want to make her a public spectacle and so intended to put her away quietly. But as he was thinking 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 Mary your wife home, for what is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you shall give him the name Jesus because he will be the one to save his people from their sins." Now, all this happened so that what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bring forth a son. They shall call his name Emmanuel; which means, 'with us [is] God.' Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him: he took his wife to [live with] him, and had no relations with her before she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he named him Jesus.

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

The lyre of the psalms is beautiful; the harp of the Spirit is inspired by God. The prophetic song both joyful and fearsome. The singing of psalms is always salvific, melodiously lulling the passions to sleep. What the pruning hook is to thorns, a psalm is to sadness. A chanted psalm shears away despondency and cuts off sorrow at its root. It sponges away the passions and silences lamentations. It removes worldly cares, comforts the suffering, moves sinners to repentance, awakens one to piety, makes cities of the desert, and chastens those in cities. It unifies monasteries, advocates virginity, teaches gentleness, lays down the law of love, blesses love for the poor, prepares for endurance, raises to heaven, fills the church with the faithful, sanctifies priests, repels demons, prophecies things to come, proclaims mysteries in advance, and promulgates the 'Trinity, saying: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The psalm proclaims that the Son sits on the throne of God, it does not denounce the one who shares the Father's essence as a ministering servant.

‘This is why the blessed David, while just now singing a hymn to the inexhaustible nature, to the omnipotent essence, the insuperable will, the grace which does not tarry, the supreme Creator, the sovereign Son, the unconditionally free God, the Lord subject to none, cried out and said: “How great are your works, O Lord! In wisdom thou hast created them all.” Let Arius and Eunomius, Macedonius and Nestorius be ashamed, that four-horse chariot of the devil, those surging summits of heresy, those rocky reefs of blasphemy, those shipwrecks of souls, those hidden ledges of impiety, those deceitful merchants who upset the balance of the Trinity. They should listen to David when he says: “How great are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have created them all!” David magnifies creation, but those blasphemers diminish the Creator! Nevertheless, all the works of our Lord Christ are wondrous beyond any expectation, for they are the awesome works of the Word of God, and as a sign of the Creator's power they readily conquer the swiftness of the tongue.

The Lord has “created all things in wisdom.” He brought forth the angels out of nothing. He beckoned, and creation did not delay. He gave the command and light emerged from darkness. He made heaven firm as an arch.’ He drew the parted land up from the sea. He adorned the sun like a bridegroom. He gave the moon its phases for the benefit of man. He fashioned the constellations of stars from the forge of light. He reconciled the warring elements (fire and water). The earth bursts forth with rivers, the planets are balanced in mid-air, for his artistry transformed opposition into love.

I shall utter the mystery! Although he is God “he appeared upon the earth,” and through the Virgin, in whom he was present, he took his place among us. His birth did not diminish him, nor did the pangs of birth alter his uncreated nature. Instead, a (created) form gave its form to the Creator, and the world contained the uncontainable one made flesh. Becoming man “without sin”! he freed our nature through the wood of the cross. By his tomb he put Death to death. From humiliation he brought forth glory. In the (Jordan) River he foreshadowed the mystery of the (baptismal) font. And the sea, the winds, and even the demons have just now testified that Christ was God, for the storm was stilled, the violence of the winds subsided, and the demons were invisibly scourged. The elements bore witness to the power of his presence, for they were terrified of him, about whom the prophet in the Psalms cries out: “The waters saw you, O God, and were afraid.”

Truly the Lord has “created all things in wisdom.” When creation was mute he graced it with speech, that is, the human person. From untilled soil he made a womb of clay for the first human being. Seed is planted in the womb, a body is formed, the clay is molded, the flesh is animated by a soul, and a living being is brought to perfection. Finding itself created in the image of God it leaps for joy,”

and the faculty of reason is born. Even so, its inner formation goes unwitnessed, its birth is inexplicable. It was no different in the case of Adam, who was the first to be created. Instead of a womb were the hands of God. Instead of human seed, the dust of the earth. Instead of months, the eternity of the creator. Instead of birth pangs, the impassability of the Fashioner. Instead of birth, the divine breath of life. Instead of milk, the fountain of paradise.' Instead of toiling for food, a freely-set table. Instead of an (arbitrary) form, the image of the archetype.' Instead of (natural) merit, immortality by grace. Instead of servants, a living being created together with him. Although the creation of Adam was a (laborious) process, the labor was no disgrace to the birth.

Let then the children of the Jews be ashamed, those who disparage the virgin birth saying: "If a virgin gave birth she is no longer a virgin." You miserable wretch! Adam was brought into the world and labor did not disgrace his birth, but when God was born according to the flesh his birth was subject to corruption? It is precisely for this reason that the Lord Christ is the second Adam according to the flesh, because the first Adam was a type of the Lord Christ." The clay foreshadowed the potter. And that Adam was a type, listen to the blessed Paul when he says: "Death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."

Listen and learn how Adam was a type of the Lord Christ according to the flesh. The servant (ie., Adam) is the principle and beginning of nature, but the Lord is the principle and beginning of life without end. Adam was fashioned by the hands of God, but Christ made himself flesh in a way that he alone knows. Adam was created according to the image," but Christ is the uncreated image." That one received a soul by divine infusion," but this one appeared in the "form of a servant." That one had paradise for his dwelling, but this one has heaven for his throne. That one was the tongue of creation, but this one is the "head of the church." That one stretched forth his hand to the tree and plucked forth death," but this one stretched out his hands on the cross and embraced the world, and in the Gospels he cries out: "When I am raised up I will draw all men to myself." That one had a woman as his accomplice, but this one had a virgin as his bridal chamber. When "Adam was sleeping his rib was removed and the woman was created" and Adam suffered no loss. When the Lord Christ was crucified and buried according to the flesh, the church was ransomed by his blood, and his suffering did not touch his divinity.

And this brings us to a disputed question. Why was Adam not awake but asleep when his rib was removed and the woman was created? Would it not have been better if he was awake to witness her creation, be amazed at the skill, and thus



glorify the wisdom of the Creator? Would it not have been better for him to see how muscles and flesh were fashioned from clay? Or the symmetrical solidity of bones, and the delicate slightness of hair? But God did not permit this for two reasons. First, Adam was put to sleep so that when losing his rib he would not feel pain, and feeling pain hate the woman, who, for her part, would in return become hostile to him. The second reason is greater, and more divine. God knows that man is a contentious creature, and that he was created with free-will. In order, then, that man should not begin to busy himself with vain inquiries into the birth of God, God imposed sleep upon him, bridling his temerity, as if to say: "If you were not allowed to behold the formation of your own kinswoman, then you should not dare to busy yourself with vain inquiries into the ineffable power of God and his birth which surpasses all understanding. If you are not able to understand the origin of man, why do you seek to know the incarnation of God?"

But I see that you are crowded together by force, and that it would be better at this point to finish my discourse. But if you are forcefully crowded together, remember that the kingdom of God belongs to those who take it by force. Permit me then to add but this: There may chance to be a Jew in our midst, like the fox of Judah lurking in the vineyard of Christ. After the congregation is dismissed, he might stand outside and mock our words, saying such things as these: "Why do you Christians invent such novelties and boast of things which cannot be proved? When did God ever appear on earth? Never, except in the time of Moses." But even then, O Jew, he did not appear. Moses himself testifies to this when he says: "Take heed to yourself and place within your heart all the words which your eyes have seen. And you shall teach them to your sons and your sons' sons. Remember the day of the Lord your God, the day of the assembly, when the Lord said to me: 'Assemble all the people to me and let them hear my words and teach them to their sons.' And you drew nigh and stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. And the mountain burned with fire up to heaven, and you heard the voice of the Lord your God out of the midst of the fire. You heard a voice of words, but you saw no likeness." Why then do you boast of things you have seen when in fact you never saw them? "What, then, are you suggesting," the Jew will respond, "that a woman was able to give birth to God?" I am not saying that a woman was able to give birth to God, but that God, having become flesh, was able to be born from a woman, for "all things are possible to him." But if you doubt my words, O Jew, give heed to the books of the prophets. Inspect them and see the entire mystery ordered into theology; behold the entire miracle of the virgin birth hidden in the shadows. For the prophet says: "On that day says the Lord Almighty"—first I will read the prophecy and then I will explain its meaning—"On that day says the Lord Almighty, each man shall call his neighbor into his vineyard, and under his fig-

tree, and," he continues, "the angel that speaks within me turned me over and raised me up, like a man awakened out of his sleep, and he said to me, 'What do you see?' And I said, I looked, and saw a lampstand all of gold, with a lamp on the top of it, and seven conduits for the oil, and beyond them two olive trees, and I asked the angel, What are these things, my lord? And he said to me, 'Do you not know what these things are?' And I replied, No, my lord. And the angel that speaks within me answered me and said, "This is the Word of the Lord". "O the depth of the riches and wisdom of the knowledge of God" We have read the prophecy; let us now proceed to its interpretation.

"On that day," says the Lord Almighty. On what day, O prophet? On the day of the incarnation, when the Virgin imitated heaven; when beams of light flashed forth from her belly; when a sun made flesh emerged from her womb; when she shaped the light into human form; when the birth of the one born was not a beginning but a dawning. "And the angel that speaks within me," he says, "turned me over and raised me up like a man awakened out of his sleep." Who is this angel? The one who announced the good news to Mary. What is this sleep? The season of the Law. For just as during sleep the eyelid covers the pupil, so too did the veil of the Law cover the heart." "And he said to me, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I looked and saw a lampstand all of gold'." What is this lampstand? It is holy Mary. Why a lampstand? Because she bore the immaterial light made flesh. And why is the lampstand all of gold? Because she remained a virgin even after giving birth. And just as the lampstand is not itself the source of the light but the vehicle of the light, so too, the Virgin is not herself God, but God's temple. "And the lamp," he says, "on top of the lampstand." What is this lamp? The Lord made flesh, the light of the universe who says: "I am the light of the world." And just as in an (oil) lamp the fluid accepts the flame, so too, in the mystery (of the incarnation) God assumed the "form of a servant." And just as a lamp shines forth its light from on high, so too did our Lord descend from the heavens to the earth. This is why the prophet cries out: "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dawn will visit us from on high.'

"And the lamp," he says, "on top of it, and the seven lights above." What are these seven lights? The successive particular laws. From whence is this clear? Because David says, "Your law is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my paths." Here he speaks of the seven laws. That there are seven laws, listen. The first law is the natural law, about which Paul says, "When the gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law." The second law is that which comes through sight, for the law proclaimed by the Creator is confirmed by the sight of creation, for "from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their

Creator." The third law is the commandment of the tree of life, about which Paul says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good." The fourth law is the covenant with Noah written in the cloud. The fifth law is the covenant with Abraham, the law of circumcision. The sixth law is the law of the letter. The seventh law is the law of grace. And that grace has its own law, listen again to Paul saying, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." And thus the prophet calls the seven laws "seven lights." But Christ came to fulfill all these laws, according to the blessed Paul who says: "Christ is the fulfillment of the law unto righteousness," and for this reason the prophet spoke of the "seven lights" as seven laws. And the "seven conduits for oil" are the gifts of the Spirit. How do we know this? From what Isaiah says: "A rod shall come forth from out of the root of Jesse, and a blossom from the root will arise, and upon it shall rest the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God will fill it." "And the seven conduits for the oil and beyond them the two olive trees." What are the olive trees? The Old and New Testaments. Why did the prophet call them olive trees? Because just as the leaf of the olive tree is evergreen, so too do the Old and New Testaments ever bear witness to Christ.

"And I asked the angel and said, What are these things?" And the angel said, 'Do you not know what these things are?' And I said, No my lord." O prophet, what are you saying? You said you saw a lampstand, and a lamp, and lights, and conduits for the oil. Why then do you now say that you do not know what you saw? "Indeed," he answers, "for seeing an image I sought to understand a miracle." It is just like those who sail upon the sea. They behold the surface of the water but fail to discern the pearl hidden in the depths. But seeing the image, the prophet searched for the mystery. And this is what he says: "I asked the angel, and I said, 'What are these things?' How does the angel respond? He does not say "this is a lampstand," or "that is a lamp," or "these are lights," and "those are conduits for oil." But forsaking the enigma, he proclaims the miracle and says, "This is the Word of the Lord," and in so doing the angel becomes an evangelist. Forsaking what he saw he proclaims the miracle and says, "This is the Word of the Lord." O Angel, what do you mean? Showing us ordinary objects, do you now preach the Word? "Yes, for the things which are seen are but an enigma, and the gift (of God) is a mystery indeed." Since it was foreordained that the Lord Christ would be born of the Virgin according to the flesh and assume the form of man, and become incarnate as he desired, it was also foreordained that the Jews would ridicule the miracle by saying "How was the 'Word of God,' the 'Word who was in the beginning,' the 'Word who was with God,' able to be born in the form of man, assuming flesh from one of his own creations?" Desiring therefore to stop the

mouths of the Jews, he showed the prophet the lampstand instead of the Virgin, the lamps instead of the laws, the conduits for oil instead of the gifts, the olive trees instead of the scriptures, and the lamp instead of the Savior. And that the prophets speak of our Lord Christ, the Word made flesh, the unchanging God, as a lamp, listen to Isaiah saying, "My soul shall exult in the Lord, for he has clothed me in a garment of salvation and a robe of joy. As a bridegroom he plaited me with a crown, and as a bride he bedecked me with beauty. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so will the Lord shine forth righteousness and gladness before all the nations. About Sion I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until my righteousness comes forth as light, and my salvation will burn like a lamp." To him belong glory, and dominion, and honor, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. — St. Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople, *Homily 2 On the Incarnation of Christ*

## **Martyr Sebastian and Companions**

*Verses*

To Sebastian.

*Sebastian despised the worship of error, and is stricken in the flesh. On the eighteenth Sebastian was clubbed.*

To Zoe.

*Zoe raises her head high. With foul smoke she received the end of her life.*

To Tranquillinus.

*"Yes, cast many stones with violence," spoke Tranquillinus from his heart.*

To Claudius.

*Those assigned to Claudius, from the depths brought him to heaven.*

To Tiburtius.

*The divine head of Tiburtius was cut off, as he cried "You are my God," O God the Word.*

To Castulus.

*Castulus was dragged to destruction in the pit, and he departed, when earth was thrown into the pit.*

To Mark and Marcellinus.

*Enemies stuck spears in the hearts; sharp spears Mark and Marcellinus.*

Of the above-mentioned Saints, the Martyr Sebastian was one of the imperial senators, during the reign of Diocletian and Maximian, in the year 292. He was from Mediolanum in Italy, which today is called Milan, and incited many Greeks to faith in Christ. Marcellinus and Mark were more notable than the rest, both by

their family and their wealth. As sons, their father was Tranquillinus and their mother was Marcia, and as brothers, they were as much physically as they were according to their souls. Because the both of them remained for many years in prison, and were tried with various torments, they were to be sentenced to beheading, so for this reason their parents and relatives gathered around them, in order to persuade them with laments and supplications, to deny their piety, while the renowned Sebastian did not want to impede them.

This brave struggler had first boldly confessed Christ (for until then he had secretly believed in Christ not due to fear, but in order to be able by this means to secretly persuade many towards piety). As I said, he was the first to confess Christ, and with amazing miracles he confirmed piety. Wherefore not only did he make firm in the faith of Christ the above-mentioned brothers, but also their father Tranquillinus, and many others by means of Tranquillinus he brought to the knowledge of God. For having come to believe, Tranquillinus catechized the eparch Chromatius. Chromatius invited the blessed Sebastian, and the presbyter Polycarp, and begged them to liberate him from the sickness by which he suffered. Having been liberated, he came to believe with all his soul in Christ. And having destroyed all the idols he could find in his house, he was baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Then Bishop Gaius ordained the brothers Marcellinus and Mark as Deacons. Their father Tranquillinus was ordained Presbyter. As for Saint Sebastian, he was appointed as an advocate for the Church. When Diocletian began a persecution against the Church, then all the others, namely Nikostratos the husband of the blessed Zoe, who held the office of primicerius, and the prison warden Claudius, and the steward of the imperial palace Castulus (who remained near the Saint, since the eparch Chromatius fled the city), and Tiburtius the son of Chromatius, and Castor and Zoe, all these, I say, were arrested separately. And after undergoing various torments, their life came to an end. Saint Sebastian was brought before Diocletian and questioned, and he boldly confessed his faith in Christ. He was thus condemned to be tied to a stake, and bound there it was ordered that he be struck like a target and covered with arrows. Thus the body of the renowned one was like an urchin, covered with arrows. The members of his body were then beaten with clubs. And having been cut up into various pieces, he delivered his holy soul into the hands of God. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## **Saint Modestus, Archbishop of Jerusalem**

Saint Modestus, Archbishop of Jerusalem, was born into a Christian family in Cappadocian Sebasteia (Asia Minor). From his youth he felt a strong attraction towards strict monastic life. Saint Modestus accepted monastic tonsure.

Afterwards, he became head of the monastery of Saint Theodosius the Great in Palestine. At this time (the year 614), military forces of the Persian ruler Chosroes fell upon Syria and Palestine, killing ninety thousand Christians and destroying Christian churches. Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem and a multitude of Christians were taken into captivity, along with the Cross of the Lord. Saint Modestus was entrusted to govern the Jerusalem Church temporarily as locum tenens of the patriarchal cathedra.

With the help of Patriarch John the Merciful of Alexandria (November 12), Saint Modestus set about restoring devastated Christian shrines, among which was the Sepulchre of the Lord. He reverently buried the murdered monks from the monastery of Saint Savva the Sanctified.

After fourteen years, Patriarch Zacharias returned from captivity with the Cross of the Lord, and after his death Saint Modestus became Patriarch of Jerusalem. Saint Modestus died at age 97 in the year 634. (*from oca.org*)

## **Also Commemorated Today**

Martyr Victor (1936).

New Hieromartyr Thaddeus (Uspensky), archbishop of Tver (1937).

New Hieromartyrs Nicholas archbishop of Velikoustiuzh, James, John, Vladimir, and Nicholas priests (1937).

New Hieromartyr Sergius deacon and Virgin-martyr Vera (1942).

Venerable [Sebastian](#), abbot of Poshekhonye Monastery (Vologda) (1500).

Glorification (1694) of Righteous [Simeon](#), wonderworker of Verkhoturys (1642).

Venerable [Florus](#), bishop of Amisus (7th c.).

Venerable [Michael](#) the Confessor at Constantinople (845).

Martyr Eubotius at Cyzicus (318).

Venerable Winnibald, abbot and missionary of England and Heidenheim (Germany) (761) (*Celtic & British*).

Hieromartyr Zaccheus the Deacon and St. Alpheus the Reader of Caesarea (*Greek*).

St. Gatianus, first bishop of Tours (3rd c.).

St. Sophia the Wonderworker (*Greek*).

St. Bodagisil, abbot (588) (Belgium)

St. Desideratus monk at Fontenelle (France) (700)

St. Flannan, bishop of Killaloe (Ireland) (7th c)

Martyr Moses (N. Africa)(c. 255)

Martyrs Rufus and Zosimus of Philippi, brought to Rome with St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107)

St. Samthan, foundress of the convent of Clonbroney (Ireland)(6th c.)

Martyrs Victurus, Victor, Victorinus, Adjutor, Quartus and Companions (N. Africa)

## Social Team for December 25

There is no social after liturgy next week.

### Study on the Divine Liturgy Wednesday Evening

As a reminder, we are holding the Study Series: *Exploration of the Divine Liturgy* on Wednesdays in the parish hall (house behind the church) at 7:00 pm following Lay Vespers (6:30 - 7:00). In the series, will work through the Liturgy to understand why each part is there, its significance in our Corporate Worship and our personal Christian development with a goal of bringing us closer to Christ. We will look at historical writings and explanations to gain a better understanding of our Liturgy.

#### Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

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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, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)