

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 25, 2022 – Nativity of Our Lord God and
Savior Jesus Christ | Christ is born! Glorify Him!**

By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

Again the love and mercy of God has made us worthy to celebrate the great feast of Christmas, the Birth of Jesus Christ as man. He who was born as God before the ages from the Father, and was born without seed in time from the Panagia as man. Two births, in eternity and in time, which have become the cause of our own regeneration. This is why the sacred hymnographers of our Church, and also all the Holy Fathers, hymn and glorify the God-man Christ, who regenerated man and renewed all of creation, giving to both man and all of creation another perspective and meaning.

In all scriptural and patristic texts it is clear that Christ was not incarnated to create a new religion, which would be included among all the older religions, but He became man, while at the same time remaining God, to create a new situation, to give man a new perspective. Christ is not a new religious leader and Christianity is not a new religion which can be added to the existing ones.



First, Christ by His incarnation proved that the so-called gods worshiped by the people were idols and non-existent fantasies. With the birth of Christ "the light of knowledge arose upon the world". He Himself proclaimed His own uniqueness: "I am the way the truth and the life" (Jn. 14:6). In His Sermon on the Mount He repeatedly said: "You have heard that it was said of old... But I say...(Matt. 5:33). In the Apocalypse He asserted: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, was and is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). Within this perspective the Holy Apostles gave the testimony of their faith and suffered martyrdom. Full of the Holy Spirit the Apostle Peter confirms: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And the Apostle Paul, referring to the mentality of the idolaters, said that their imprudent hearts became darkened by their vain thoughts and thus they "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:23).

Then Christ, by His teachings, life, Cross and Resurrection, healed man from the sickness of religion, as taught by the late eminent teacher of our Church who reposed recently (Fr. John Romanides). The various other religions are trying to atone the alleged wrath of God, seeking to overcome the separation barrier between man and God, boldly using imagination and reflection and satisfying human passions. Thereby they create illusions of salvation, cultivating fanaticism and aggressiveness, and they cannot go beyond the problem of death and sin. But Christ, the true God, united human nature to the divine nature, conquered death with the Cross and His Resurrection, smashed all the idols of the so-called gods and freed man from the tyranny of death, sin and the devil.

And, of course, this means that Christianity is not a religion like the others, it is not even a religion at all, but it is the Church. This is not a religious community that aims to worship God to be redeemed, but to be the Church, which is the Body of Christ, the union of God and people, the living and the reposed. The Church is a spiritual hospital, a hospital that heals the diseased personality of man and frees him from death and corruption, liberating the powers of the soul and body from the corruptible powers of the passions and establishing the whole personality of man. It is exactly because it heals the ailing human personality, that is why this is a real family, in which love is cultivated between members, through which philanthropy and compassion develop, and even human relations are restored in society and in the entire creation.

Within this framework we claim that Christianity is not a religion, but the Church, and there is a big difference between religion and the Church. Of course, it is possible for some of the members of the Church to perceive Christianity as a religion, to religionize, that is, ecclesiastical life, altering Christianity from a way

of life to a standardized religiosity, from communion with the living God to a magical and ceremonial relationship with God. Yet the Church is not responsible for this, but people who are unable to meet the high meaning and purpose of ecclesiastical life and remain in a low religious level, which they absolutize.

Today, with the great feast of the Church, the Nativity of Christ, where everything celebrates and everything is brilliant, you should feel Christ who is born today also in the Divine Liturgy, not as a leader of a religion, but as the Lord of heaven and earth, the only God and Savior, the Healer and Savior of our souls, the Head of the Church which sanctifies man, healing and helping him conquer his passions and his anthropocentrism. And living in the maze of anthropocentric and imaginary religion that cultivates fanaticism and hatred, we should embrace the teachings of Christ, and to experience His life in order to gain together with the entire world both meaning and purpose. The grace and mercy of the incarnate Son and Word of God be with you all. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:4-7 EOB

Brethren, when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those who were under the law and so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" Now, you are no longer slaves, but children; and if you are children, then you are heirs of God through Christ.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 2:1-12 EOB

At that time, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying: "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we have come to express adoration to him." When King Herod heard about this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. They replied, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet: You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod privately called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and express adoration to him." After listening to the king, they continued on their journey and behold, the star which they had seen in the east was going ahead of them, until it came and stood over the place where the young child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with tremendous joy. Entering the house, they saw the young child

with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and expressed adoration to him. Opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But having been warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they returned to their own country using another way.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

”In the beginning was the Word”; the other gospel writers expounded the genealogy of our Lord and God Jesus Christ in the flesh, but John, the distinguished one among the gospel writers, the lyre that speaks of God, discoursed on the existence without beginning of God the Word, and narrated the Father's engendering of the Son, before the ages, and without witness. And he said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him.” (Jn. 1:1-3). These five stones are sufficient for the Church as fortification. For he said, “In the beginning was the Word.” He did not say, “In the beginning the Word came into existence, but “In the beginning was the Word.” He indicated that the existence of the Son was without beginning, pointing also to his relationship with the Father. And stronger stands the foundation of our faith! “And the Word was with God.” He indicated the indivisibility of the divine essence, and loud sounds the thundering of the evangelist against the pagans! “And the Word was God.” He indicated the exact similarity of nature, and great falls the blow against the Jews! “He was in the beginning with God.” He pointed to the eternal co-existence of the Son with the Father, and great indeed is the fall of the Manichaeans! “All things were made through him.” Heaven is his creation. The earth is his handiwork. The sea is his work. The air was created. Light came forth from that which existed not. The angels became his servants, the powers his ministers, the cherubim his throne. The Father is God. The Son is Word and God. But also the Holy Spirit is God! And number did not impair the nature of the divine existence, nor did the Trinity divide the essence, but it is a triad of equal substance in power, in divinity, in goodness, that firmly founded and preserved our faith, and fortified the Church, and sanctified the world, and destroyed the devil, and punished the demons, and brought them to naught, and made the circumcision of the Jews void, and expelled the error of the pagans, and blocked up the mouths of heretics.

And the evangelist discoursed on the Father's engendering of the Son before all ages and without witness, and wrote in his gospel, “The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (J. 1:19). And again, “And look, a voice from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased'” (Mt. 3:17). Therefore the engendering above in heaven before all things was without witness, because an only Son was engendered by an only Father; and no

one knows how he engendered, except the Father. And the Son knows how he was engendered; for time existed not, for he himself is the Creator of the ages. Angels were not present, for it is he “who makes his angels winds” (Ps. 103:4, Heb. 1:7). Heaven existed not, “for by the word of the Lord the heavens were established” (Ps. 32:6). The sun existed not, for he positioned “the great light to illuminate the day” (Gen. 1:15). The moon existed not, nor the stars, “for he established the moon and the stars” (Ps. 8:4). The earth existed not, for he said, “Let the waters be gathered, and the dry land appear” (Gen. 1:9). Indeed in a wondrous way the evangelist explained the Word's existence without beginning, and the Son's engendering before the ages and without witness.

O blessed John, who taught you to say these things? The sea of Genesaret? But it does not teach doctrines. Fishing? But it does not discourse on God and divine truths. Zebedee? But he is a common man. The fatherland? But it is insignificant. The village? But it consists of country people, not city dwellers. The Jews? But they are transgressors of the law. The law? But it contained a shadow. Moses? But he was weak-voiced and slow of tongue. David? But he was “a worm, and not a man” (Ps. 21:6). How then did you say, “In the beginning was the Word”? Who lifted you up to such a great height? Who endowed your mind with such wings? For through faith you left the earth, and came to stand above the air, and passed beyond the ether; you flew beyond the supramundane heights of heaven; you leapt over the things above; you went past archangels; you were put on a level with the seraphim; you arrived at the throne of the Lord, surrounded by the cherubim; you were given wings by faith; you proclaimed with a loud voice the inconceivable engendering; you proclaimed the incomprehensible existence; you discoursed on the Word that has no beginning. For you said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Beloved, great is the grace of God. A man, three cubits tall, went with his mind and thoughts, together with the Word, into heaven. In faith he saw one who came without suffering from the bosom of the Father, indeed God born of God. He saw the Holy Spirit worshiped with the Father and the Son, the Trinity glorified in unity, divided into three persons, but united in nature. And the evangelist was found far above the seraphim, because they cover their faces on account of the divine lightning, but he, by reason of grace, discoursed on both the divine engendering and existence.

And having again in reality descended from the heavens upon the earth, he stated, “The Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14). Behold the mystery of God, without change and alteration; behold the Word that became flesh on earth, without having withdrawn from the heavens; behold the virgin who gave birth, but whose virginity was not impaired; behold a womb, wider than heaven; behold a mother without

travail, and a birth without pain; behold God being born as man; behold a child, that was full-grown before all times; behold one bound in swaddling-clothes, who unbound by his command the grave-clothes of Lazarus; behold creation which recognized the Creator; behold a cave, the place of expiation for the world; behold the creature carrying the Creator; behold the one being fed, who feeds the one feeding him; behold the one at the bosom of a mother, but not separated from the bosom of the Father; behold one worshiped by the Magi, and praised by angels; behold one who fled to Egypt in the flesh, but holds the earth in his hand; behold one baptized with water, who caused the waters to gush forth from the earth; behold a master betrayed by a disciple; behold one bound, who did not unbind the virginity of the mother; behold him who stood next to Pilate, but who formed Pilate from clay; behold him who was crowned with thorns, but who crowned the earth with flowers; behold him who was crucified on earth, but who was lifted up into the heavens; behold a corpse in a tomb, who raised the dead from the tomb; behold one risen, who beforehand made known the resurrection; behold one who descended into Hades, but who ascended into the heavens. For Hades vomited forth the one whom he swallowed in his ignorance.

And who is it then whom he saw? Who? “He who bowed the heavens, and came down” (Ps. 17:10) silently. He who escaped the notice of the powers above; he who did not leave the throne of his Father empty, when he became incarnate from the virgin. In heaven “without mother” (Heb. 7:3), God from God, and earth born of a mother, son of a virgin, the Lover of mankind who became man on account of men. He who sanctified the immaculate womb through his indwelling; he who freed the womb from blemish; he who consecrated nature's organs of generation; he who sealed the womb of the virgin; he whom the heavenly places did not confine, and whom the womb did not limit; he who before the ages created the ages; he who with authoritative power created the world by his word; he who is the ineffable Word of the Father; he who is the Son consubstantial with his Begetter; he who is without beginning, not admitting of a beginning, but having taken on a beginning of existence. Beloved, beyond human conception are the wonders, because the throne in heaven was not made empty, yet the world on earth was saved. The five statements of John, the great and loud-voiced evangelist, contain all these things. Let the pagans therefore be annihilated, and the Jews destroyed. Let the Samaritans be put to shame, and the Manichaeans be dispersed. Let heretics be destroyed, and all the enemies of the immaculate catholic and apostolic church, because the hope of them all is doomed to a fall and perdition, but our hope is focused on resurrection and life eternal, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, as well as the the Father and the Holy Spirit, belong the glory and the honor and the power, forevermore. Amen. — St. Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople, *Homily 15 On the Engendering of Christ*

Priest-monk Jonah the Martyr of Pechenga

Based on the Synodikon of the Solovetsk Monastery in northern Russia about 1500 AD -- the exact date is unknown -- the Priestmonk Jonah was born in the Pomeranian village of Varzuga in Russia's northern Murmansk district. After serving as a parish priest, he entered the Pechenga Monastery, where he became a close disciple of Saint Tryphon.

Saint Jonah was martyred in December 1589 -- one year before the beginning of the Russian-Swedish War -- during an attack on the monastery by Swedish-Finnish invaders. Tradition holds that he and his concelebrant, the Priestmonk Herman, were martyred during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, as they were receiving the Eucharist. They, together with 115 monks and laypersons killed during the invasion, were venerated throughout the Novgorod region. In 2003, they were formally glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church for Church-wide veneration.
(from oca.org)

Also Commemorated Today

The Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar.

Commemoration of the shepherds in Bethlehem who were watching their flocks and came to see the Lord.

New Hieromartyr Michael priest (1930).

St. Adalsindis, nun at Hamay-les-Marchiennes in France (c. 715)

St. Alburgh, foundress of a convent in Wilton (England) (c. 810)

Virgin-martyr Eugenia of Rome (257)

Social Team for January 1

Team 3 is up next week - Edgington, Victor Barzykin, R&C Wright. Thank you!

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.

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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.)