

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church
4419 Leonardtown Road
Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor
(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Vespers 5 PM

**Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM | Sunday School
9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10 AM**

December 24, 2023 –

Sunday Before & Eve of Nativity

Sunday of the Holy Fathers | Martyr Eugenia

Today, all the Saints who shone forth—both before the Law and under the Law—in Old Testament times, those times before grace and truth shone forth from our Incarnate God and Savior Christ; today, all these Saints are commemorated by the Church as co-heirs of Christ, co-equal with all the New Testament Saints—Apostles, Martyrs, Hierarchs, Monastics and Righteous Ones.

Some shine out more brilliantly than others. Some are more well known to us or closer to our hearts. Some of us have heard about them since we were little children, having their glorious deeds and faith impressed upon our imagination and heart. Some of us may have never read the Old Testament at all, or maybe only a little bit.

Some of the Saints have called the Holy Scriptures nothing less than Paradise. I think this is because when we open the holy books, and read their divine words, we are immersed within a world of holy men and holy women with whom God walks, just as we hear that He walked amidst the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.

Truly the Holy Scriptures are a Paradise. The first Saints from the foundation of the world are revealed thereby. The Mother of God—whom we can call the truest tree of life—is seen to be most beautifully surrounded by all the fragrant flowers,



healing plants and mighty trees of the Saints. Coming forth from the Mother of God—that truest tree of life—is Christ our God and Savior, the all-blessed Fruit of Immortal Life!

This Divine Fruit is offered to us unworthy ones every Sunday and Feast Day in the Holy Chalice. Adam and Eve committed one sin, being deceived by the serpent on account of their untested simplicity—for this they were deprived of that Tree of Life, cast out of Paradise, committed to toil for hundreds of sorrowful years in agony and remorse, and then they spent 4500 years in dark and dismal hades until Christ came to save them, raising them back up to Paradise—and not only that, but bringing them with Himself in His all-glorious ascension unto the high throne of Divinity!

One sin they committed, and then they were banned from that Immortal Fruit. How many sins do we commit? How many passions do we nourish? How many times do we fall into the same dismal cycle of negative and evil thoughts? How many times do we assert ourselves as gods in our pride? How many times do we turn our mind and heart away from God? Yet, how many times have we been allowed to dine upon the Divine Food—the Immortal Fruit, even our God Who gives Himself to us an all-saving, most-sweet, life-giving and deifying Feast?

Today we have open before us a divine Paradise—the countless Saints of the Old Testament. What purity is found in them! What simplicity and faith! What courage and endurance! What virtue fills them! They did not know what we know—they did not fully comprehend that God would become incarnate and visit us as Emmanuel. They perceived in symbols and shadows! But we are given the reality and substance of these things. However, we often live as if we didn't know these things; yet these Saints shone so brightly with many graces and eternal splendor even before Christ.

Truly, the Holy Scriptures are a divine Paradise. If we open them, we will be immersed within a heavenly world of pristine breezes, beautiful fragrances and refreshing crystal-pure waters. Adam and Eve are there. The most-righteous Abel, the divine Enoch, the all-graced Noah are there. Shem, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are there. Judah and Levi, the all-comely Joseph are there.

Moses and Aaron, the holy Israelites, the mighty Joshua, the righteous judges are found there also. Godly kings, noble warriors, other-worldly prophets are found there too. David, Solomon, Hezekiah, the most righteous Josiah, Elias (Elijah) and Elisseus (Elisha), Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, the valiant Maccabean Martyrs, the zealous Maccabean warriors are there also. Isaiah, Daniel, the three holy youths, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the God-graced and God-illuminated prophets are found there too.

Amidst these numbers is also Joachim and Anna; and opening the New Testament we find the Mother of God, the all-chaste Joseph, the most-just James, the blessed Forerunner John, the God-Receiver Symeon, the holy women, the glorious Apostles, disciples, the first martyrs and all the faithful.

Truly the Holy Scriptures are another Paradise. When we open them and immerse ourselves in them, we dwell in Paradise with the angels and saints, and we are in the company of Christ with His Father and the All-Holy Spirit.

Some of the saints are presented to us as fragrant flowers to cheer our innermost souls. Some are given to us as mighty trees to wonder at and to take shelter under. Some are given to us as healing plants which provide remedies for all our passions. Some blossom forth sweet and nourishing fruits for us. We are free to walk amongst them, to come to know them, to mingle with their most-humble and benign and all-bright company, to learn their ways, to feast with them, to walk in their world.

We are free to choose the ones which delight our souls the most, and warm us with warm fervor and divine delight in God. Some are closer to us than others, but none of them are envious. Some have us in mind more than others, and they watch over us with unsleeping care and constant intercessions to Christ our common Lord and God and Savior—yet we might not be aware of it.

When we think of a saint, they are thinking of us. When we invoke the saints, they hearken to us and help us that we might all be more knit together into the heavenly family of the Father of all.

Truly the saints are a Paradise, and the gates of this Paradise are Holy Scripture and fervent prayer to them. Let us seek those that are closest to our hearts and provide the best remedy for our passions and sorrows and afflictions.

Are we grown old in sin and feel barren and embittered in this world? If we open the book of Genesis we will be refreshed with those pristine breezes of the newly-created ancient world with its first-created peoples.

Are we afflicted and oppressed by our many passions? The book of Exodus will show us that our God is a mighty Deliverer from all evil. Are we insensible to holy things and Church life? The book of Leviticus will instill within us a reverence and sense of the holiness of God and wonder at His wise ordering of divine worship.

Are we wandering in the desert of a dried-up soul with many temptations? The book of Numbers will give us consoling hope in God's long-suffering and the power of His salvation. Do we desire a greater respect for the spiritual law of God? Deuteronomy will instill within us wondrous thoughts and holy fervor.

Joshua will teach us courage in our spiritual warfare. The Judges will show us that God does not forsake us in our sins if only we cry out to Him in our affliction and desire repentance; and this He does not just once, but even if we turn away from Him countless times, yet if we turn back to Him He will receive us again. Ruth will warm our hearts with piety. Samuel will teach us uprightness. The holy kings—with David and Josiah at their head—will show us how to live divine and godly lives amidst earthly-plenty and amidst the greatest evils of worldly life.

The Chronicles will teach us how many people God cares for, and how He knits together all our lives into a well-ordered, unified whole. Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah will teach us zeal for the Church and the Holy Faith. Esther will teach us how to use rank and position for the good of all. Judith will teach us that youth, bodily beauty and riches are nothing; for she had all these and was left a widow early on, yet she remained chaste and single-handedly defeated the blasphemous Holofernes and saved her people.

Tobit—the one who confessed of himself that he alone and his house remained faithful to God when all his tribe worshiped Assyrian idols—this Tobit will teach us how to be true family members, how to live with angels and how to live for God no matter what.

The Maccabean Martyrs will teach us that nothing is so painful as disobeying and rejecting God, not even being seared in flames, having our flesh raked off or our innards spilled to the ground. The Maccabean warriors will teach us how to nobly lay down our lives for our brethren and how to strive with all our heart for the purity of God's grace. The Prophets will teach us sobriety, godly fear, true contrition and repentance, the vision of eternal realities and how to live in holiness amidst this fallen and corrupt world.

Solomon will teach us the vanity of this brief life, the beauty of eternal heavenly wisdom and how to sing divine hymns. David will give us psalms and prayers which express our innermost feelings and yearnings more eloquently and more thoroughly than we can ourselves. Sirach will teach us how to live in every situation according to God's will. Job will teach us how to live blamelessly amidst sickness, depression, feeling forsaken by God, terrible diseases, the abandonment by friends and the misunderstanding of worldly-minded people.

All of these are offered to us as healing remedies, cheering fragrances and mighty protectors. If we immerse ourselves in the world of these saints, they will teach us how to prepare ourselves to receive Christ into every fiber of our soul.

They will lead us to Christ, they will keep us in Christ, by their prayers they will give birth to Christ in our hearts. This is the mystery which has been hidden from the ages, as St. Paul says: "Even, Christ in you!" He has deposited Himself within

our hearts by His incarnation. He has chosen us as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people! How can we reject His great gifts by our insensibility, our wicked habits and our thirst for worldly impurity?

May the Lord Christ forgive our ignorances, our weaknesses and failures! May He overlook all our sins! May He truly make us to feel His very life pulsing through every fiber of our being! May He prepare us to give birth to Him in our hearts at His Nativity! Only He can fill us with His grace! We are weak and barren and helpless! But with God all things are possible and eternal life is given to us, unworthy as we may be! Meditating on this great love of God and seeing it so beautifully alive in all the saints, we cannot help but be moved and transformed unto a better and more holy state. Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us! Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

Saint Eugenia the Martyr as a Model for our Lives

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saint Eugenia lived in the third century and came from a noble family of Rome, but grew up in Alexandria of Egypt where her father was appointed Provincial Governor. Her parents were pagans and were called Philip and Eugenia. Saint Eugenia, however, was baptized secretly from her parents and when she grew up, because they were forcing her to marry a pagan, she left and went to a male monastery, where she was received because she disguised herself as a man and changed her name to Evgenios. She did this so that her parents would not find her and force her to return to them.

Saint Eugenia showed great zeal and exceeded the male monastics in asceticism, the virtues and spiritual feats. This resulted in her being recommended for the position of Abbot of the monastery, after the Abbot departed this vain world. At first "Monk Evgenios" refused, but seeing the great love and perseverance of the monks, "he" gave in.

At that time Abbot Evgenios encountered a very great temptation. Since he was young and beautiful, a nun, when she saw him, was conquered by a satanic eros and wanted fraudulently to lure him into sin. Naturally, Evgenios did not consent to her lawless appetite, and she slandered him by saying that he corrupted her, and even accused him of corrupting other women. As a result Abbot Evgenios was dragged before the Governor of Alexandria to be tried. Because the governor and his colleagues blasphemed Christ, derided Christians and slandered the angelic order of monks, Saint Eugenia, despite her initial determination to endure everything in silence, was forced to speak and reveal the truth. The result confounded the slanderer and she was punished as an example, but also the

Provincial Governor, her father, came to believe in the true God, was baptized and then became a confessor and martyr for Christ.

After the martyrdom of her father, Saint Eugenia moved to Rome together with her mother. There she was arrested and after horrific tortures was beheaded, and by this she sealed her testimony for Christ with the blood of her martyrdom.

The life and disposition of Saint Eugenia gives us the opportunity to highlight the following:

Slander, which is an unfair and false accusation of someone, is a great sin for the slanderer, but also a great temptation for the one being slandered. A hymn chanted in the Service of the First Hour during Holy and Great Lent says, among other things, the following: "Deliver me from slanderous people and I will keep Your commandments." In other words, the believer is asking God to deliver them from the slanders of people, and by this he will keep His commandments.

Whoever does not want to reach the point of becoming a slanderer, must learn to not be a lover of accusations. That is, to not accuse anyone except themselves. Because the one who reproaches and blames themselves acquires humility, from which is born love, and this is why they do not accuse others. They are forgiving towards others, and try to justify their errors and weaknesses, while they are strict only with themselves. Conversely, one who is lenient with themselves refuses to take responsibility for their actions, they justify themselves continuously, they are strict with others and blame them for the slightest thing, and they censure and condemn them. One of the characteristic features of the Saints is that they are strict with themselves and lenient with others. They never criticize and condemn unless they do so to themselves, and they consider themselves not only below other people, but even below irrational creation. And they believe that everyone else will be saved and only they are worthy of hell, but they do not despair.

Characteristic are the words of the shoemaker of Alexandria, to whom God sent Saint Anthony in order to learn about his life and disposition: "Everyone can be saved, but I alone am separated." That is, this man of God would say that all other people would be saved, but he alone would be condemned to hell, because he considered himself the most sinful man in the world and worse than everyone and everything. Yet he did not despair, but placed his hope in God, believing that God could save him if He wanted, despite his sinfulness. And this is why we continuously and uninterruptedly call upon divine mercy, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

Also, we must be very careful with what is known as suspicion, because suspicion can lead people to falsehood and slander. Abba Dorotheos calls suspicion "intellectual falsehood" and urges us to avoid it because, as he stresses, those who

rely on their suspicions are led to incorrect conclusions, which results in accusing and injuring innocent people.

It has been observed that sooner or later the slanderer will be punished, or rather penalized, in accordance with spiritual law. Of course, there is also repentance. On the other hand, the slandered, naturally, hurts and is pained, is tortured and suffers, but God never abandons them, rather He empowers them and gives them rich Grace and His blessings. It suffices that they are patient and place their hope in God.

The spiritual experience of the saints testifies that for each temptation allowed by God, He in turn gives countless blessings. It suffices that we endure without complaint, thanking and glorifying God for all things. (*fr. johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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.

Homily on the Beatitudes 9

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in the heavens, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).

This beatitude is a continuation of the previous beatitudes of Christ which He made in His Sermon on the Mount prior to His activities. As can be easily seen, the previous beatitudes were addressed in the third person - such as "blessed are the poor in spirit", etc. - while this beatitude is addressed in the second person, which means that with this beatitude Christ turns to His Disciples and Apostles, saying "blessed are you."

Thus, this beatitude is a continuation of the previous beatitude that refers to persecution, but it applies to His Disciples. This is why it is not a different beatitude, but it is counted together with the previous one.

It speaks here of insults, persecutions and false and evil statements, for the Apostles were called charmers, deceivers and many other things. If someone is insulted or persecuted without a false statement or not on behalf of Christ, then they will be miserable and a scandal to many.

Whoever is persecuted for Christ and the life of Christ, should not be saddened, regretful or bitter, but they should rejoice leaping for joy, because they will receive a great reward in the heavens. This is the glory that adorns the Martyrs and the persecuted. When we speak of glory, we mean the Light of God, because this Light is the Kingdom of God, the spiritual heaven. In this beatitude "heavens" is in the plural, because everyone will participate in the Light of God depending on their spiritual condition, which is why Christ said: "In My Fathers house there are many mansions" (Jn. 14:2).

Christ, addressing His Apostles, reminds them of the Prophets, who were persecuted and acquired great glory. This is the lot of the Righteous. The Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs are models and examples to us on how to live our lives, how to die and how to live for eternity.

When one reads the eight beatitudes carefully, from beginning to end, they will find that it records the path of the Christian life. A Christian begins their spiritual

life with humility, which is a sense of poverty in Christ, having the feeling that one is far from God, and being without grace they are impoverished, for which they acquire godly mourning. Repentance is the state of humility. After mourning comes meekness, which is followed by hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. Since the Grace of God can now be tasted, they begin to search for something more. Thus, they become merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and then they endure persecutions with joy.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian presents the relationship that exists between each of the Beatitudes of Christ and how from the first beatitude the Christian progresses towards the last beatitude. He teaches that where humility is found, there are the depths of a humble spirit and there is the illumination of the Holy Spirit, there prevails the emanation of the Light of God and God lives with wisdom and in the knowledge of His mysteries. There also is the Kingdom of Heaven, and the awareness of the Kingdom and the hidden treasures of spiritual poverty.

Thus, according to Saint Symeon the New Theologian, where there is spiritual poverty there is joyful mourning and ceaseless tears that cleanse the soul, making it most radiant. By this the soul is lifted, it recognizes Christ and becomes gentle, motionless towards anger, and it hungers and thirsts to learn the righteousness of God. Hence they become merciful and sympathetic, their hearts are purified and cleansed, and they clearly see the glory of God. Then, those who have such pure souls, which can see the Light of God, are called peacemakers and become children of the Highest, who love God and endure every pain and sorrow, insult and persecution with a feeling of joy, because they have become worthy of being dishonored by people for His love.

By experiencing the Beatitudes of Christ and the radiance of the divine Light we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit in the heart by which the spiritual fruits of Christ shoot forth, such as meekness, peace, mercy, sympathy, kindness, goodness, faith, temperance, love and joy for temptations and the willingness to die for the brethren.

And Saint Symeon the New Theologian urges us to examine ourselves with precision, that we may know if our souls bear the seal of the Holy Spirit and if Christ is within us. Conversely, if we have not received Christ and His seal, then there lives within us this wicked world and we are strangers to eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven.

From all this it seems that the spiritual life begins with humility, the sense of our spiritual poverty, and progressively a Christian will live in the Grace of God, and eventually the entirety of this life is completed with persecutions and martyrdom, which is the glory of the Christian.

Hence, martyrdom is the end of the Christian life, the fruit of the vision of God, the result of the knowledge of God. Martyrdom is not simply a good mood or human emotion and a strong will, but it is the fruit of the vision of God. This is shown by the fact that along with the beatitudes a person experiences the Kingdom of Heaven, is comforted by God, inherits the earth, is satisfied with the Grace of God, obtains mercy, sees the Light of God, and becomes a temple of God. With such great spiritual gifts on the one hand they are not accepted by the world, and they cannot keep up with people's thoughts.

The Beatitudes of Christ are the basis of the Christian life. Within them is hidden our entire spiritual path. May we all experience them in our lives. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Christ is born, praise Him! Christ from heaven, respond to Him! Christ on earth, exalt Him! He who sits on a cherub comes to earth! Born in a sinful world is the eternally begotten of God the Father!

The King of the Universe is coming from heavenly heights to man who has fallen deep into the pit of sin and unbelief! Cheer up, all you who live on earth! The Son of God is coming to you and for you! He comes to us not for punishment and judgment, but for our salvation.

He is already here, in little Bethlehem, in a miserable manger. Why this squalor? Why did He come to the small earth, to the small city, Whom the heavens cannot contain? To gain being created "a little lower than the angels", in the image of God's man.

Just as a good shepherd, leaving 99 sheep in the mountains, goes to look for only one lost sheep, so the unceasing praises of countless hosts of angels are not enough for the Lord, and He goes to call those who are "a little lower than the angels", the lost human race.

Just as a woman who has lost a drachma carefully sweeps the floor in order to find it, so the Lord goes around the sinful earth in order to cleanse it.

In the midst of angelic chants, God heard the groan of suffering humanity, and from the fullness of the glory of heaven He sees the blackness of the earth. And the Lord comes, goes to give heavenly glory to the earth, and angelic blessedness to people.

With what gratitude our hearts should be filled towards Him! With what a loud salutation from the depths of our souls we must greet Christ. Indeed, His love extends to each of us, and He wants to raise each of us to heaven. With what shall

we meet Him? What worthy gifts shall we bring to Him? “What shall we bring You, O Christ, as you have appeared on earth, as a man, for our sake?”

The whole creation of God hastens to bow to the newborn King, its Creator. Angels bring Him singing, the sky - a star, the Magi - gifts, the shepherds - reverent amazement, the earth - a cave, the desert - a manger, the human race - the Virgin Mother.

What will each of us bring especially from ourselves? “With what shall I stand before the Lord, bow down before the God of Heaven? Should I stand before Him with a burnt offering, with one-year-old calves?” (Micah 6:6), the Moabite king Balak once asked. "Oh man! It has been told you what is good and what the Lord requires of you: only act justly, love the deeds of mercy, and walk humbly before your God" (Micah 6:8). "Offer the sacrifice of God's praise and fulfill your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 49:14).

Therefore, let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of a mouth that glorifies His name. “But at the same time, let us not forget doing good and sharing, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb. 13:15-16).

The Lord opened the heavens for us on earth. Let us open our souls and our hearts to the Lord. Let our lips proclaim to Him singing and praise, but let our hands do works of mercy. To the Lord lying in the manger, together with doxology and praise, let us each bring from our hearts some kind of good deed.

May the joy of the whole world fill the heart of everyone, driving away the sorrows of life around us and raising our minds and aspirations to heaven. For from there a joyful angelic gospel is heard: “Today there is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

St. John Maximovitch, *Nativity Message of 1935*

May the joy of the whole world fill the heart of everyone, driving away the sorrows of life around us and raising our minds and aspirations to heaven. For from there a joyful angelic gospel is heard: “Today there is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

– St. John Maximovitch, *Nativity Message of 1935*

Holy Abba Betimius

*You stripped yourself of your corruptible skin Betimius,
And will receive it incorruptible at the resurrection.*

Abba Betimius lived a venerable life, and reposed in peace. In the *Lausiac History*, the following is written about him:

1. Abba Betimius said: "When I went down to Scete they gave me some apples to take to the brethren, and when I had knocked at the door of Abba Achilla, he said to me when he saw me, 'If these apples had been of gold I would not have wished you to knock at my door; and moreover, do not knock at the door of any other brother;' so I returned and placed the apples in the church and departed."

2. Abba Ammon said: "On one occasion I and Abba Betimius went to visit Abba Achilla, for we had heard that he was meditating upon the passage, 'Fear not, O Jacob, to go down to Egypt' (Genesis 46:3), and that he was repeating these words several times; and when we knocked he opened unto us, and he asked us, saying, 'Where are you from?' And being afraid to say, 'We come from the cells,' we made answer that we were from the Mountain of Nitria, and he brought us in, and we found that he was working by night at plaiting palm leaves, and we asked him, saying, 'Speak a word unto us.' Then he answered and said, 'Between the evening and the morning I have twisted twenty branches, but in very truth I have no need for all this, only I am afraid lest God be angry with me, and He chide me, saying, *Though you were able to work you did not do so*; therefore I toil and I work with all my might.'"

3. They used to say of Abba Betimius that, when the brethren were coming down from the harvest to Scete, they brought down as a gift for the brethren who were there a jar of oil, which contained the measure of a kesta and was sealed with plaster. And at the return of the period the year following when they were going to the harvest, they brought everything which was of benefit to the church; and Abba Betimius made a small hole with a needle in the vessel of oil, and poured out a little for himself, and thought that he had done some great thing in not having consumed the whole of the oil which was in the vessel. And when the brethren brought their vessels with the plaster coverings intact and the vessels themselves unopened, whilst his vessel had been perforated, he stood there full of shame, just like a man who thinks that he has been found committing fornication.

4. Abba Betimius asked Abba Poemen, saying, "If a man be angry with me, and I express my contrition, and he will not accept it, what am I to do?" The old man said unto him, "Take with you two of your friends, and express your contrition in their presence." And the old man Betimius said unto him, "And if he will not be persuaded to accept it then?" And Abba Poemen answered and said, "Take with you five others." And Abba Betimius answered and said, "And if he will not be persuaded by these?" Abba Poemen said, "Then take with you a priest." and Abba Betimius said, "And if he will not be persuaded then?" Abba Poemen said unto him, "Without anger and without excitement pray unto God that he may put into his mind the desire for peace, and straightway you shall have no further care." (from johnsanidopoulos.com)



Office of the Metropolitan

312 Garfield Street

Johnstown, PA 15906

CHRISTMAS ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE

December 25, 2023 / January 7, 2024

Protocol No. 10/2023

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today I greet you with great joy and love in the Name of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us give thanks to Almighty God, by whose grace we have been given this opportunity to celebrate the Birth of His Son.

As we look around ourselves, we find mistrust, suffering, hatred, homelessness, drug overdoses, crime, and senseless killings and the absence of peace and love in our homes, neighborhoods, cities, country and in fact the whole world. This reality in our lives makes us to want to cry out for God's help, assistance and intervention.

My beloved ones, despite all the suffering, sorrow and injustice in our world, today we rejoice because hope comes to us once again. This is why at this blessed time of the year we look forward to the arrival of the new born King.

Therefore, let us celebrate the miracle of His Birth. Let kindness come with every gift. Let compassion, forgiveness and love come with every greeting. Let our hearts be filled with prayer, charity, and reconciliation for one another.

May all of us, Priests, Panis, Deacons, Sub-Deacons, Readers, Acolytes, Archons, Parish Officers, Teachers, Parishioners (young and old), Friends and Supporters of our God-protected Diocese experience the joy and wonders of the Shepherds and the awe and respect of the Three Wise Men at the arrival of the Messiah, our new born King. Christ is Born!

Greetings from Johnstown with much love,

+Metropolitan Gregory

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

To be read as the sermon in all churches of the Diocese at the Divine Liturgy on the Feast Day of the Nativity of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Also Commemorated Today

*[The Eve of the Nativity of Christ](#) (*Rozhdestvenskiy Sochel'nik*).*

Virgin-martyr [Eugenia](#) of Rome, and with her Martyrs Philip her father, Protus, Hyacinth (Jacinth), Basilla, and Claudia (262).

New Hieromartyr [Innocentius](#) (1928).

New Hieromartyr [Sergius](#) priest (1942).

Venerable [Nicholas](#) the Monk of [Bulgaria](#) (9th c.).

Ven. [Agapios](#) the New (Greek) (1812)

Martyr [Achaikos](#)

Venerable [Antioch](#), monk of Palestine (635), and St. Vitimionus of Scete.

New Martyr [Achmed](#) (Ahmet) the Calligrapher of Constantinople (1682) (*Greek*).

Venerable [Aphrodisius](#), monk of Palestine (6th c.).

St. [Adela](#), [abbess](#), & her sister St. [Irmina](#), of Palatiolum near Trier (Germany)(c. 730)

St. [Alberic](#) (Albert), monk at Gladbach Abbey (Germany)(10th c.)

St. [Bruno](#), monk at Ottobeuren Abbey (Germany)(c. 1050)

St. [Delphinus](#), [bishop](#) of Bordeaux (c. 404)

St. [Gregory](#) of Spoleto (priest-martyr)(c. 300)

Martyrs [Lucian](#), Metrobius, Paul, Zenobius, Theotimus, Drusus, and companions at Tripoli (unk)

St. [Tarsila](#), nun, aunt of Pope St. Gregory the Dialogist (c. 581)

St. [Venerandus](#), bishop of Clermont in Auvergne (423)

St. [Caran](#) (Scotland)(7th c.)

Prayer to Our Lord by Monk Antiochus of Pandectis

And grant us, O Master, repose of body and soul as we go to sleep, and preserve us from the gloomy sleep of sin and from every dark and passionate pleasure of the night. Quell the attacks of the passions; quench the fiery darts of the evil one which are treacherously directed against us. Put down the rebellions of our flesh, and lull to sleep our every earthly and material thought. And grant us, O God, a wakeful mind, a chaste thought, a sober heart, and gentle sleep, free from every satanic fantasy. Raise us up at the hour of prayer, confirmed in Your commandments and having within ourselves a steadfast remembrance of Your judgments. Grant us to hymn Your glory all the night long, that we may sing, bless, and glorify Your most honorable and majestic Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Social Team for December 31

Team 5 – Cooper, Mary V., Steven Watts . Thank you!

Nativity Vigil on Christmas Eve

This evening at **5:00**, a Nativity Vigil followed by the Liturgy of St. Basil will be held at St. Thomas. Please observe at least a 3 hour fast if you plan to receive the Eucharist.

Also note that we will commemorate St. Basil the Great and the feast of the Circumcision of our Lord with a divine liturgy on Monday, January 1 at 8 AM.

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

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

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

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

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

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, 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, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Jacob, 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.)