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ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES



Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM | Sunday School 9:30 AM

~ Divine Liturgy 10 AM ~

December 29, 2024 – Sunday After Nativity (Joseph the Betrothed, Prophet-King David & James the Brother of the Lord) | Holy Innocents Slain by Herod

On the Sunday after the Birth of Christ, we commemorate the Holy and Righteous Joseph the Betrothed, James the Brother of God, and David the Prophet and King.

I honor Joseph the betrothed of the Virgin, as her sole elected guardian.

Who will I declare, as a witness before the Lord, David being found of His own heart?

You were not only a carpenter's child, but the brother of the Lord, who built all things by His word, blessed one.

David the Prophet and King was the son of Jesse. He was taught the Law of the Lord by the Prophet Nathan from Gibeah, who prophesied for forty years, which was 999 years before the advent of Christ. Nathan foreknew that David wanted to transgress the Law of the Lord, and commit adultery with Bathsheba. As he made haste to go and tell him of his future sin, he was hindered in this by the envious devil in the following manner. By the road he found a dead man who had been

murdered lying naked, and he remained there to bury him. During that time, David committed the sin. Knowing this, Nathan returned to his home weeping and in sorrow. When David killed Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, the Lord sent the Prophet Nathan to him in order to rebuke him. David repented and wept much for these two sins, and after he grew very old he died and was buried with his fathers.

Regarding Joseph the Betrothed and his son James the Brother of God, everyone knows, as we learn of them in the divine Scriptures. Their Synaxis takes place in the Great Church, and in the apostolic Temple of the Holy Apostle James the Brother of God, within the revered home of the Most Holy Theotokos in Chalkoprateia. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

JESUS CHRIST: THE ETERNAL VICTOR

Translated from the "Voice of the Lord" of the Apostolic Ministry of the Church of Greece, by Fr. George Dion.

The Gospel reading of this Sunday describes the flight of the infant Jesus to Egypt, the slaughtering of the infants by Herod and the return of Jesus to the city of Nazareth. This briefly says that the story of the God-man is tragic from His first days. What is more tragic, however, is the condition of the chosen people who give chase to their Savior. Nevertheless, God interferes and directs the steps of Joseph. Does this alleviate human responsibility? Of course it doesn't.

The position of Joseph is that of every spiritual person. The beginning of the life of the Lord on the earth teaches us many things. It teaches us that we must expect temptations and plotting from the beginning. What does this mean? It simply means that when someone is deemed worthy of undertaking a spiritual ministry, he should expect tragedies and perils. He should not, however, be upset. He must accept everything courageously, knowing that this is exactly the course of the spiritual life. It has temptations conjoined to it, because these "good" temptations weave the life of the righteous.

St. John Chrysostom says that the temptations are not met with the strength of the body, but with the disposition of the soul. This is why the sky is not as bright with its captivating reflections and colors, as the souls of those persons who endure their temptations by the grace of their Lord and transform them into joy and spiritual life experiences. The road towards sanctity is not inhibited by any temptation or human obstacle. This is because we are not alone, but have God inside us and around us, who opens the way of Divine knowledge. This is the road that leads to the beautiful Gate of Paradise.

The position of Herod is that of every unjust person. St. John Chrysostom, interpreting the rage of Herod on account of the mockery of the Magi, says that when a soul is ungrateful and incurable, she does not retreat before anything and

especially does not accept that she seeks after unfeasible things. Human beings, when they reject the faith and remove from their souls the fear of God, not only dare, but put to practice everything. An ungodly human being becomes a wild beast, and for this reason, woe to them who may fall into the hands of ungodly persons.

Since Herod acted unjustly, why did God allow this? In the Old Testament, Israel is the son of God, whose position has now been taken by Jesus Christ. In the last analysis the chosen people of God is now restricted to the one and unique Person, Jesus Christ. It is from Jesus Christ that a new people will be born, whom God will lead out of Egypt, according to the prophesy of Hosea, which now finds its full meaning. God, then, allowed this because the plan of the Divine Economy is never aborted.

When the righteous is treated unjustly, then, we ask, why does God allow this? The answer is given by St. John Chrysostom: "Whatever we may suffer unjustly in the hands of another, God will count this injustice either to cover some of our sins or to give us a reward." In other words for all the injustices which we endure, we either wipe out sins, or earn brighter rewards if we have no sins. This is why we never put such questions to God, especially if we want our faith to be like that of Abraham, and to have the privilege to serve actively the will of God.

In the Person of Christ there is everyone who is treated unjustly. Jesus Christ was pursued from the very beginning and he had to flee from his place because of the murderous fury of Herod. The one who left was He who would save His people according to the order that Joseph received from the Angel. What does this mean for us? It means that we must never be anxious, when what is done to us is contrary to what we expect. God often fulfills His plans by contradictory events, giving us in this way the greatest proof of His power. Let us never forget the saying, "Mine is the retribution. I will recompense, says the Lord." In other words, to God belongs both the retribution and the recompense (Heb. 10:30).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, by becoming man and going through all the events of the Divine Economy "came out as a victor to accomplish victory." In other words, He was given the crown of victory, and departed as a victor in order to accomplish new victories. One of these, which is the most substantial, will be the one in which God will come to dwell among the people for ever, and will wipe out every tear from their eyes (Rev. 21:3-4). "O Lord may Your kingdom come." AMEN!

On the twenty-ninth of this month [December], we commemorate the Holy Infants killed by Herod, numbering fourteen thousand.

*By a sword the mother's babes were killed untimely, by the enemy of the Babe who fashioned the babes. * On the twenty-ninth the slaughtered infants called for papp.*

Since King Herod ordered the Magi to return, in order to inform him concerning the newborn King, Who was indicated by the star which they followed, that he may also go and venerate Him: then, because the Magi did not return to Herod, as they were ordered to do so by the Angel, they returned to their homeland by another way. I say this because of what follows, for Herod felt played by the Magi, and he became enraged and very bitter. Thus having in mind what the Magi told him, that the star appeared less than two years prior: for this reason he sent his soldiers to kill all the children of Bethlehem, all those that is who were under two years of age. He vainly thought that if he killed all the babes, certainly he would kill also He who was to rule in the future, in order that He not contrive against him. However, the mindless one in vain toiled so, not knowing that man can never thwart the will of God. Thus, for the infants, he brought about the Kingdom of Heaven. For himself, the wretched one brought about eternal hell. (*from Johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 1:11-19 EOB

Brethren, as regards the Good News which I preached, I proclaimed this to you, brethren, that it is not of human origin. I did not receive it from man and I was not taught [this Good News] by man, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard about how I used to live in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God beyond measure, and how I ravaged it. I advanced in the Jewish religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, as I was more extremely zealous for the traditions of my forefathers. But when it was the good pleasure of God, (who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles), I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood: I did not go up to Jerusalem to visit those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia. Later on, I returned to Damascus. Then, after three years, I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and I stayed with him for fifteen days. However, I did not see any of the other apostles, a except James, 'the Lord's brother.'

Today's Gospel Lesson – Matthew 2:13-23 EOB

After they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise! Take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." So Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt. They remained there until the death of Herod, so what had been spoken by

the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

When Herod saw that he had been outwitted by the wise men, he became extremely angry. He dispatched [his men] and killed all the male children who lived in Bethlehem and all the surrounding countryside, two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men. And so, what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, a weeping and great mourning: Rachel weeping for her children. She would not be comforted, because they are no more.' But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream when he was in Egypt, saying: "Arise! Take the young child and his mother, and return the land of Israel; those who were trying to kill the young child are dead." Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother, and they came into the land of Israel. However, when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee. He thus arrived and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazarene."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion – At the time when the King was born in Bethlehem, the Magi left the land of the Persians with gifts, guided by a star from on high; but Herod is stirring up trouble and mowing down the children like wheat, lamenting that his power will soon be destroyed.

While those on high and those on earth are rejoicing, what is there at Ramah to cause endless lamentation there? Jacob is exulting; but why is Rachel mourning? Joseph has been recognized; but why does Rachel groan? Benjamin has been exalted; why, then, does Rachel weep? Come, then, let us see the lamentation and mourning; for she does not mourn for the first children, but those who were betrayed and redeemed, those whom the most savage Herod has now slaughtered. For he matched the very time at which the star shone forth, and sent to Bethlehem to deprive Rachel of her children because of the child of Mary. But she found them again with joy, while Herod laments that his power will soon be destroyed.

The anxiety which he had always feared now came to him when he did not wish it.; for what he had not expected he learned on studying the sayings of the prophet, for Isaiah said, "Unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called 'Messenger of great wisdom'." He is a strong God upon His throne, and in the manger; and He

is everywhere, and infinite. Herod, frightened, deeply feared Him, and investigated carefully to learn where had been born, where appeared the King of the universe. And he learned for a certainty that his power will soon be destroyed.

He was suddenly aroused from peaceful slumber, and he was thrown into confusion through fear, for he was constrained by fear, and he trembled at the name of the one who was born. When he learned from the Magi the power of the child, he uttered cries of suffering mixed with laughter: “O, of all unexpected evils, that a babe should make me afraid! O, miserable idea that I should tremble before a child whom I have not seen! I rule over sea and land, and an infant terrifies me! What shall I do today? What shall I plan for tomorrow? Suddenly a star has shone upon the whole earth, and has heralded Him as mighty King who will destroy my kingdom, and I mourn that my power will soon be destroyed.”

These words he uttered in his confusion, and mulling over these thoughts, he pondered how he could most quickly destroy the infant whom the Magi proclaimed. Calling his army, he gave them license as he spoke to all of them in a rough voice as follows: “Go quickly in to cities and the countryside in full armor, and bearing yourselves proudly, assuming a garb of mercilessness, and slay all the sons of Bethlehem. This war is no difficulty, no cause for timidity; I send you against babes, tender two-year-olds; no one opposes a royal order. All people tremble, and they do not say 'His power will soon be destroyed.'”

When they heard this, the army at once answered the speech of Herod: “We are afraid to bring about what you have commanded, for fear that we be ridiculed. For who of foolish men will not laugh that we make war on babes? If it is Bethlehem where the babe is born, command us and we shall soon destroy it all, palaces and homes. Then no one will say to you, 'King do not bother with this matter'; no one will blame you for finding out what you learned. Attack, attack the one who comes on earth from Heaven. It was a tradition in Bethlehem to produce kings; do not give offense to Bethlehem lest your power will soon be destroyed.”

“Hitherto Bethlehem produced David, the great king; Goliath, a foreigner, feared David after he was born with a terror as great as we now feel for the one just born. Therefore, if it seems best to you, O King, let all Bethlehem and its boundary spots be searched so that among the infants slaughtered there we may find this babe who has been born and destroy him with the others. The birth was revealed to you and the place was made known to you; the Magi mocked you and the prophets terrified you. Command your followers, then, and we shall wipe from the earth the one who wants to overthrow your kingdom, and do not be fearful that your power will soon be destroyed.”

Immediately after he had hearkened to the words of his soldiers, the slayer of infants became as a fire, and sent forth as javelins the darts of his anger, not for burning thorns, but for murdering babes, and defacing the earth with blood. For his mind was unhinged and his reason darkened, not by drunkenness but by envy. He himself became a grape of bitterness as the unjust man cut down young branches for the sake of one; the former he cut off, but he did not overtake the latter. For this reason he was filled with savage anger as he heard the report; and he remained in mourning that his power will soon be destroyed.

The wolf, having tracked down the great whelp, arouses the wicked dogs against him; they run in and outside Bethlehem seeking their prey; but he mangles the lambs, and not the lion, for he cannot with his glance meet him face to face. The vultures hunted the eagle on the mountains, but he was in hiding, covering and warming with His wings the nest which He had just built with His own hands, although it was just a short time ago that the virgin, without husband, had given birth to Him; for He is His father and maker of the world and creator of peace. And if Herod makes war, toiling uselessly, he will in truth sing a dirge that his power will soon be destroyed.

When a shining cloud spread over all Judaea and cast its shadow, Herod introduced darkest night and covered all men with gloom. At once he revealed the children, who by nature are joyous and laughter-loving, weeping bitterly. Those who a short time ago were rejoicing in the childbirth of the immaculate and pure Mary are not wailing with lamentations. Just as though a flower on the very day of its bloom fell to the ground, and everyone seeing it mourned and declared to Rachel: "Come, weep, Rachel; join in mourning with us, a song of distress in place of a joyous ode; in place of a sweet hymn, let us offer weeping." His power will soon be destroyed.

The echo of those who weep for the young children makes a crash like thunder on the earth, for the hills and ravines and deep valleys of the mountains cried aloud in answer. As though imitating the wailing, they practiced beats of lamentation with one another. It was necessary to see the earth full of blood, and the desert and the uninhabited places, for this lawless and very arrogant man extended his anger right up to these places. For he pursued the mothers and when he caught up with them he snatched the children from their very arms, like the fledgling of a sparrow singing a sweet song. And he slaughtered them, not understanding – the wicked fellow – that in spite of doing these things, his power will soon be destroyed.

With bared swords, the soldiers met the mothers carrying their children in their arms. Overcome with fear, the mothers cast down their children whom they had nursed with love, for women are by nature fearful – perhaps they also become impulsive and rash. It was in this spirit that some of them importunately begged

their murderers, and they laid bare their necks to them since they desired to die before their children rather than see them slaughtered. Each mother became a reliable witness of this, so that each cried bitterly, "Kill them, but the bosom of Abraham will receive them like the faithful Abel." But Herod mourns that his power will soon be destroyed.

As the lawless ones shed the innocent blood of the blameless children, it is necessary to recall Abel, as he offered to God his sacrifice, pure and undefiled, and then be reassured. For he was slain. Also, one must consider Zacharias as he brings his accusation there before God against those who murdered him; for always the Jews and those who govern them were insolent and lawless, murderers, and stupid, and transgressors of the law. They rejected Moses; they cut Isaiah in pieces, and now they are slaughtering the children of Rachel. Hence, indeed, they mourn that his power will soon be destroyed.

O depravity, O madness of the King, O pitiless temper which made war on babes and showed no mercy to his own people; he was not mindful of his own children, nor of the fact that there is the same nature for all. He did not pity his family; but maddened with rage he at first ignored even himself and then all of his brothers, as he attacked all people like a wild beast when it flees from its pursuers who lay snares for it. Fathers mourned for their sons and mothers with them; but the shameless man did not care about them; but one thing alone he considered as he wept that his power will soon be destroyed.

With daggers they are slain mercilessly, these blameless infants as though in a massacre; some were transfixed and breathed their last horribly; others were cut in two. Still others had their heads cut off as they suckled and drew milk from the breasts of their mothers. Then, as a result of this the cherished heads of the babes hung from the breasts, and the nipples were still held within their mouths by their delicate teeth. The distress of the women who were nursing the infants redoubled and became intolerable as they were physically torn from their two-year-old infants, and as they were robbed of their babes by order of the king. Because of this order, he weeps that his power will soon be destroyed.

Herod was seeking an unripe grape by which he would make an unseasonable harvest. Winter was settling in when Mary produced the unfertilized grape, and he did not find a ripened fruit but reaped a green harvest. For the fruit of the only pure virgin is going to flee to Egypt along with the vine, to be planted there and bring forth fruit – flee from the land of the Jews, arid and barren of anything beautiful, and arrive at the Nile, which is fertile – not as Moses on the river, thrown in the marsh, protected by a wicker basket, but rather as one to overthrow all their

idols there. As Herod is a friend of these idols, he sees that his power will soon be destroyed.

Nets and snares were fashioned, then, for the young fawn of the Virgin and mother of God, but the trap was broken and the fawn escaped, tearing the snare. With his mother, like a blameless deer, he fled into Egypt, as Micah once said. Ruler over all who is everywhere, where do You flee? Where do You lead? In what city shall You make Your dwelling? What house will contain You,? What place will support You? No part of creation anywhere is invisible to Your sight, but all things are laid bare to You, the Maker of all, O Christ. Why, then, do You flee, Holy One? Because of You, Herod mourns as he weeps that his power will soon be destroyed.

The one who flees, flees absolutely, in order that He may escape being recognized by those who seek Him. But the only merciful Jesus, our Savior, fled in His visible form, but by all of His deeds was made known to all. At the very time when He arrived in Egypt, straightway all of the statues fashioned by man were shaken down; for the one who caused the trembling in Herod also brought on the quaking of the idols. He was hidden in the arms of His mother, and He acted as God. He proceeded into Egypt and an angel from on high ministered to His flight. Of His own will He was banished as a poor little babe; and as wealthy, He announced to all why Herod mourns that his power will soon be destroyed.

You, then, my brothers, grant me pardon for my heedlessness; and let us rise to worship the One who came to save the whole human race, as we cry out from contrite heart to the Master to be delivered from the slayer of men and quickly released from our sins to find the road of virtue. And I am the first to say this, for I have sinned greatly, both knowingly and in ignorance; and I have angered God by my impure deeds. For this reason, I beg you to rise with me and cry out sincerely, “By the intercession of Your holy mother, O God, and of Your holy innocent Babe, do not separate me from You kingdom, Christ.””

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion O.3 On the Massacre of the Innocents*

An Orthodox Response To the Death of the Innocent

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

There is a small treatise by St. Gregory of Nyssa titled "Concerning Infants Snatched Away Prematurely", that is to say, taken from life before they had tasted the life for which they were born. The treatise was written for Governor Hierios of Cappadocia, who had asked St. Gregory of Nyssa what we ought to know about those who depart from life very early, whose death is joined with their birth.

In setting out to elaborate this theme, St. Gregory of Nyssa takes the opportunity to praise the governor in fine words, calling him an "excellent" and "esteemed head". Beyond the expressions of polite address, it appears from the introduction that the Governor of Cappadocia had many qualities and gifts. He was distinguished by an indifference to material wealth as well as by an interest in men's souls, which he held in the treasury of his love. In other words, he loved people and was not characterized by self-seeking.

Likewise it appears from the introduction to the text that at the time of writing this treatise St. Gregory of Nyssa was advanced in years. He likens himself to an old horse that is staying outside the racing stadium. However, he declares that he will strain his attention to answer the Governor's request.

Among Hieros's other gifts was that he sought to be informed about the working of divine economy. He was asking why one person's life extends into old age while another's is finished just as he is entering life.

The problem is really existential. St. Gregory puts it very beautifully. At his birth a human being enters on the scene of life, draws a breath of air, beginning the process of living with a cry of pain, pays the tribute of a tear to Nature, just tastes life's sorrows before any sweets have been his, and before his joints have consolidated, tender as he is, he dies, perhaps because he was left exposed as a newborn child, or because he has suffocated, or because some illness has suddenly put a stop to his life. Along with this fact, the question is also put as to whether the infant will be judged by the Judge like other people, whether he will receive a reward cooled by the dew of benediction, or whether he will be burned in the purifying fire. And this uncertainty arises because the child has done nothing in his life, neither bad nor good. For where there is no giving, there is no giving in return. Consequently, if there is no action and choice in infants, there is no reason for them to earn what we are hoping for. If the infant enters the Kingdom of Heaven in spite of this, then it is in a more advantageous position than those who have lived and struggled in their lives. If we think in this way, everyone is better off not to live long.

After having pinpointed the questions and problems, he goes on to give an exhaustive answer. Of course he confesses from the start that these great topics belong to the unsearchable thoughts of God, and therefore he exclaims with the Apostle: "How rich and deep are the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments, how undiscoverable his ways! Who has ever known the mind of the Lord?" (Rom. 11:34-35). Nevertheless he proceeds to the matter at hand, because he believes in the divine grace which illumines all who have it.

Without presenting his thoughts rhetorically in antithetical words, he proceeds to deal with the topic by a rational sequence.

The first point he makes is that human nature comes from God. Furthermore, the cause of the origin of all beings is in God and not in themselves. Uncreated nature, which is God's, surpasses every sense of dimension; it neither increases nor decreases, and indeed it is beyond any definition. By contrast, created nature is changeable, that is to say it increases and decreases. Human nature is composite, made up of heterogeneous elements, the noetic and the sensible, and it is a living image of the divine and transcendent power. Noetic nature belongs to the angelic and bodiless powers, which dwell in supramundane space, because that space is the most suitable for their bodiless nature. Here St. Gregory is speaking about the body which angels have, which he calls "a heavenly body subtle and light and ever-moving", because noetic nature is fine, pure, weightless and ever-moving. By contrast, sensible nature is not analogous to the noetic. Therefore in order that the earth might not be unfortunate and lack an inheritance from noetic nature, God created mankind, so that the noetic and the sensible might be united in his nature. In other words, man is a summing up of the whole creation, since he is composed of noetic and sensible.

The second point is that the aim of the creation of man is that God should be glorified by noetic nature in the whole creation. Just as the body is maintained in life by the foods of the earth precisely because it is earthly, so there exists also an intelligible life by which our noetic nature is maintained. Just as the food going in and out of our body leaves a power in it, so also the noetic is given life by its participation in essential being.

Therefore the life suitable for noetic nature is participation in God. Each thing has its appropriate organ. The appropriate organ for the enjoyment of light is man's eye and not his finger or any other member of the human body. So it is that vision of God takes place through the noetic in man. Therefore life is participation and communion with God. And naturally this participation is knowledge of God at the depth at which the soul is able to contain it. Ignorance of God, of course, means non-participation in God.

Withdrawal from this life is a fall and ignorance. Since the fall of man, God has been working to cure the evil in us. It is evil to be withdrawn from God and to have no communion with Him, and the cure for this is to return into life again and attain communion with God. What is good then is to cure the noetic aspect of the soul, and of course whoever does not turn to the mystery of the Gospel word is ignorant of how to cure it.

What St. Gregory of Nyssa is pointing out here - and I think it is very important - is that the appropriate instrument for communing with God is the noetic part of the soul. It is through this that man participates in God and acquires knowledge of Him, which is life for him. But because the fall is man's alienation from life and his illness, which is also his death, the noetic part of his soul needs to be cured so that it may see the Light and attain participation with God.

Human nature was formed by God so that it might hope for this life and be brought towards it. This is the purpose for which man was created, to be united with God. Thus the enjoyment of this life and the fulfillment of man's purpose, which is theosis, is not a repayment and a reward, but a natural condition. And not to participate in God is not a punishment, but an illness of man's soul and of his whole being.

St. Gregory takes our eyes as an example. The capacity of our eyes to see is not a prize and a reward, but a natural condition of healthy eyes. And the inability to participate in vision is not a condemnation and the result of punishment, but a man's illness. Therefore the happy life is innate and proper "to those who have purified their senses". But those who have spiritually unclean eyes and do not know God do not participate in God. This is not a punishment, but a natural state of illness of the noetic part of their souls.

The third point, which is connected with the preceding ones, is that the good which is hoped for is by nature proper to the human race. And naturally this pleasure is, in one way, called a repayment. Enjoyment of this life is not a matter of justice, but a natural state of health of the soul. St. Gregory says this because of the way the question was put: How will the infant be judged or where he will be sent, since he did neither evil nor good in his life? St. Gregory says that the problem is not to be put in this way since it is not a matter of justice, but of a natural state of the health or illness of human nature.

This can be understood by the use of an example. Let us suppose that two men have an eye disease, and one of them submits to the cure and takes whatever medical science advises, even if it is disagreeable, while the other not only does not accept any advice from the doctor, but also lives intemperately. The first, for a natural reason, will enjoy his light, while the second, for a natural reason, will be deprived of his light.

This example shows clearly that it is proper to human nature to enjoy that life, while the illness of ignorance prevails in those who live according to the flesh. The person who cures and purifies his spiritual eyes and washes away the ignorance, which is the impurity of his soul's spiritual perception, attains this natural life. The other, since he evades purification and lives with illusory pleasures, making the

illness difficult to cure, is estranged from the natural, lives a life contrary to nature and becomes a nonparticipant in this natural life which is communion with God.

If this is the natural course and natural ending of a man, in whom, according to his way of life, the eye of his soul is either cured or not, the case is somehow different with the infant. Since he has not had the illness in the first place and does not need to be purified and cured, he is living according to nature and therefore, as he is inexperienced in evil, he is not prevented by any illness of the soul from enjoying participation in the Light.

This teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa gives us the opportunity of underlining here that the soul of man is not impure at birth, but pure. Man from his birth experiences illumination of the nous. Therefore we see that even infants can have noetic prayer, corresponding of course to the images and representations of their age. When a person is created, his nous is in a state of illumination. We have observed many times that there are infants who pray, even in their sleep. A monk of the Holy Mountain says that when small children turn their attention in some direction and laugh without a reason, it means that they see their angel. What happens in the lives of saints, for whom it is altogether natural to be with the angels, happens in little children.

Therefore Orthodox theology does not teach what theology in the West says, that man inherits the guilt of the ancestral sin. For we believe that at birth a person has a pure nous: his nous is illuminated, which is the natural state. The inheritance of ancestral sin, as we said in another place, lies in the fact that the body inherits corruptibility and mortality, which, with the passage of time, and as the child grows and passions develop, darkens the noetic part of his soul. Indeed the developed passions linked with corruptibility and mortality and darkness of the environment darken the noetic part of the souls of children.

There is the problem of what happens at holy Baptism. That is to say, since infants have a pure nous which is in a state of illumination, and they have noetic prayer, then why do we baptize them?

The answer, as we see in the whole patristic tradition, is that by holy Baptism we are not getting rid of guilt from ancestral sin, but we are being grafted on to the Body of Christ, the Church, and are acquiring the power to conquer death. This is how we understand the baptism of babies. We baptize them so that they may become members of the Church, members of the Body of Christ, that they may pass over death, overcome the garments of skin, decay and mortality. That is to say that as they grow, whenever the nous becomes darkened by passions and the darkness of the surroundings, they may have the ability to conquer death in Christ, to overcome the passions and to purify the noetic part of their souls once more.

If Baptism works in infants in this way, adults are prepared for Baptism by purification of the heart from passions. Then, through holy Chrism, illumination of the nous is received. Furthermore, through holy Baptism they become members of the Church and, being united with Christ and participating in the sacraments, they acquire the power to defeat death and attain deification. The deepest purpose of Baptism for both infants and adults is to attain deification, which is achieved only in Christ and in the Church.

Since this point is quite crucial, I may be permitted to quote the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa about the purity of the souls of infants: "Whereas the innocent babe has no such plague before its soul's eyes obscuring its measure of light, it continues to exist in that natural life; it does not need the soundness that comes from purgation, because it never admitted the plague into its soul at all". The infant's nous is pure, it has not been ill, it is distinguished by health and the natural state and therefore is not prevented at all from partaking of the divine Light.

St. Gregory of Nyssa always makes use of examples from the present life to explain the life which is to come. He states that there is an analogy between the present way of life and that of the future. Just as infants are suckled and fed with milk at first, but later are fed with other foods one after the other at the appropriate time, it is the same with the soul. It always takes part in life in the fitting order and sequence. This was said by the Apostle Paul, who first fed the Corinthians with milk and then gave solid food to those who reached the intelligible age.

There is a difference between the infant and the mature man in what pleases them. The man is pleased by his enterprises, by social recognition, by gifts and honors from others, by family life, by entertainments, shows, hunting, and so on, while the infant is pleased by milk, the nurse's embrace, and the gentle rocking which brings peaceful sleep.

The same is the case with spiritual age, in relation to spiritual blessings. Those who have nourished their souls with virtues in this life will in the future life enjoy divine comfort in proportion to the habit which they have acquired in this life. However, the soul which has not tasted virtue but is also not sickened with evil can also share the good to the depth to which it can contain the eternal blessings, empowered by the vision of Him Who is.

Thus infants, although inexperienced in evil, will share in divine knowledge, divine Light, empowered by the vision of God, by divine grace; and naturally with the vision of God they will advance to more perfect knowledge. Actually God manifests Himself to all, "giving himself as much as the person in question accepts".

St. Gregory of Nyssa's thought is that the soul by its nature is led towards the good, towards participating in the divine Light. According to his receptivity a person receives divine grace and divine enrichment. This is independent of his physical age and the abundance or nonexistence of virtues. It is within this perspective that one should see a person's future state, and not compare the virtuous life of the mature person with the life of the infant and the immature person. He who undertakes such a comparison is himself immature, for he shows that he does not have theological arguments.

The fourth point which St. Gregory analyzes is why God permits a baby to die at such an age. Having analyzed previously that as far as participation in the divine Light is concerned, the number of years which we have lived does not play a great role, he now goes on to explain why God permits sudden departure from this life.

In answer to this question he says that no one can put the blame on God in cases where women murder their children because of illicit pregnancy. But as to the cases in which infants leave this world through some infirmity even though their parents have cared for them and prayed for them, we must look at them within God's Providence. For perfect providence is that which does not simply heal the sufferings which have taken place, but it protects the person from even tasting things which would happen in the future. Whoever knows the future, as is the case with God, will naturally prevent the baby from growing up, so that he will not be brought to a bad end. Thus in the latter cases it is precisely because He sees the infant's bad future that God does not permit him to live. God does this out of love and charity, without essentially depriving him of any of the future blessings, as we have seen.

In order to make this economy of God understandable, St. Gregory offers a beautiful and descriptive example. Let us suppose that there is a rich table with many appetizing foods. Let us go on to suppose that there is a supervisor who, on the one hand knows the qualities of each food - which one is harmful and unsuitable and which is suitable for eating - and on the other hand is very familiar with the temperament of each dinner guest. Let us still further suppose that this supervisor has absolute authority to permit one person to eat the food and prevent another, so that each one will eat what is suitable for his temperament and the sick person will therefore not be tormented nor the healthy one fall into loathing because of excess of food. If the supervisor should find out that one person had become drunk from much food and drink, or another was beginning to be drunk, he would get him out of that particular place. There is the case of a man who was put out of that place and turned against the supervisor, to accuse him of depriving him of the good things through envy. But if he were to look carefully at those who remained and suffered from sickness and headaches because of drunkenness, and

expressed themselves with ugly words, then he would thank the supervisor for saving him from the pain of overeating.

This example matches human life. Human life is a table at which there are abundant foods. Life, however, is not sweet as honey, but also has various disagreeable foods such as salt and vinegar, which make human life difficult. Some foods arouse boasting, others make those who share them go into a frenzy, losing their heads, and in others they cause sickness. The supervisor of the table, who is God, takes away from that table promptly him who behaved properly in order not to be like those who suffer from excess of pleasure because of their gluttony.

In this way Divine Providence cures illnesses before they are yet manifest. Since God, with His prognostic power, knows that the newborn child will make bad use of the world when he grows up, He removes him from the banquet of life. The newborn child is detached from life so that he will not use his gluttony at the table of this life. On this point too we see the great love and philanthropy of God.

The fifth point, which results from the foregoing, is the question of why God makes a distinction in His choice, why he takes one away providentially, while he lets the other become so bad that we wish that he had never been born. Why is the baby taken from this life providentially while his father is left, who drinks at the banquet until his old age, strewing his evil dregs on himself as well as on his fellow-drinkers?

In answer to this question he says that what it means is a word "to the most grateful", to those who are thankful to God and, naturally, are well disposed. Besides, these are mysteries which man's reason cannot grasp, precisely because God's "reason" is different from man's reason.

St. Gregory maintains that what God arranges is not fortuitous and without reason. God is reason, wisdom, virtue and truth, and He will not accept what is unrelated to virtue and truth. Thus sometimes, for reasons which we have mentioned, babies are snatched from life early, and sometimes God permits something different, because He has a better end in view.

It is also permitted and granted by God that evil people should remain in life so that some benefits may be derived. Referring to the Israelites, he says that God permitted Egypt to oppress them in order to teach the Israelite people, just as He also brought the Israelites out of Egypt so that they would not become like the Egyptians and acquire their customs. With poundings on the anvil even the hardest iron, which does not soften in fire, can take the form of a useful tool.

Another argument is dealt with as well. Some people maintain that not all people in this life have banished the fruits of wickedness, nor have the virtuous benefited

from the sweating labors of virtue. To this St. Gregory of Nyssa replies that the virtuous will also rejoice in the next life, comparing their own blessings with the loss suffered by those condemned. This is said from the point of view that the comparison of opposites becomes "an addition of pleasure and an increase for the virtuous". To be sure, it does not mean that they rejoice at the condemnation of other men, but they thank God for their salvation, because they are experiencing the happiness of virtue in contrast to the unhappiness of sin and the passions.

Therefore infants are snatched away from life prematurely in order that they do not fall into more dreadful evils. If some live and become evil, this has other reasons which are in the Providence and Wisdom of God. Nevertheless some benefits will come, since God does not do anything without a reason and a purpose.

The fact is that the infants who depart from life prematurely neither find themselves in a painful state nor become equal to those who have struggled to be purified by every virtue. They are in God's Providence. Anyway, the journey to God and participation in the uncreated Light is a natural state of the soul, and infants cannot be deprived of this, because by the power of divine grace they can attain deification. *(from Johnsandidopoulos.com)*

All Orthodox Christians Who Died by Hunger, Thirst, Freezing and by the Sword

Today the Church remembers all Orthodox Christians who died as martyrs for the glory of Christ by hunger, thirst, freezing, and by the sword, whose names are not known to us.

This feast reminds us that God's sight is not like that of men. People usually glorify and honor those who are renowned and famous; whereas God sees both those who are known and those who are unknown, the exalted and the humble, as long as each person sought to do His will. Thus, at the time of the Last Judgment, the least of these Christians will shine forth incomparably more radiant than the most illustrious and prominent kings of this world.

Their Synaxis took place in the church of the Most Holy Theotokos at Chalkoprateia, a district in Constantinople, west of Hagia Sophia. *(from oca.org)*

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable [Marcellus](#), [abbot](#) of the monastery of the Unsleeping Ones (485).

St. [Basiliscus](#) the Hesychast of Siberia (1824).

New Hieromartyr [Arcadius](#), Bishop of Lubny (1937)

New Hieromartyr [Yakov](#) (Gusev), priest (1937)

New Hieromartyr [Theodosius](#) Belenky, priest (1938)

Virgin-martyrs [Natalia](#), Natalia, Eudokia, Anna, Matrona, Barbara, Anna, Eudokia,

Ephrosia, Agrippina and Natalia (1942).
Venerable [Mark](#) the Grave-digger of the Kiev Caves (11th c.).
Sts. [Theophilus](#) the Weeper and John of the Kiev Caves (11th-12th c.).
Venerable [Theophilus](#) of Luga and Omutch (1412).
Venerable Laurence of Chernigov (1950).
Venerable [Thaddeus](#), confessor, of the Studion (818).
Venerable [Benjamin](#), monk, of Nitria in Egypt (392).
Venerable [Athenodorus](#) the leper, disciple of St. Pachomius the Great (4th c.).
St. [George](#), bishop of Nicomedia (9th c.).
St. [Albert](#), founder and abbot of Gambron-sur-l'Authion (France)(7th c.)
Martyrs [Callistus](#), Felix, and Boniface of Rome (unk)
Martyrs [Dominic](#), Victor, Primian, Lybosus, Saturninus, Crescentius, Secundus and Honoratus (N. Africa)(unk)
St. [Ebrulfus](#) (Evroult), hermit of Ouche Forest (France)(706)
Martyr [Girald](#) (Girard, Giraud), abbot of Saint-Arnout in Metz and St. Wandrille in Normandy (1031)
St. [Trophimus](#), first bishop of Arles (3rd c.).

No Social Team for January 5 - Light Fare Only

Feel free to bring something to share. Please note that, according to the Typicon, **no meat or dairy is consumed this day**; it is the Eve of Theophany. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, 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, Fr. Nectaros & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)