



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **December 22, 2013** ✠

**The Sunday before the Nativity
Forefeast of the Nativity**

Holy Ancestors of Christ

Great-Martyr Anastasia of Rome (304)

"To all the farthest parts,
the earth is filled with joy!
The Theotokos now hastens to
the cave to bear the King of all!
O wonder past all
interpretation! For the
Fleshless takes flesh; the
Beginningless begins. Now the
cave takes within, Him Who
holds together all!
O Creation, dance for joy
on the Forefeast!
O Bethlehem, leap with
jubilation."

🔔 Nativity Service Schedule 🔔

🔔 **Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24:**

✠ **10:00am Nativity Royal Hours**

✠ **Christmas Eve Supper 3:00pm Church Hall**

✠ **Nativity Eve Vigil – 6:30pm Compline & Matins**

🔔 **Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25:**

✠ **Nativity Divine Liturgy ~ 10:00am** ✠

🔔 **Feast of the Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and
God and Savior Jesus Christ** 🔔

⇒ **Friday, December 27 ~ Parish Christmas Party ~ Nick and Ashley Wells' – 6:00pm**

⇒ **Next Sunday, December 29 Children's Christmas Program after Liturgy!**

⇒ **Fast-Free Twelve Days of Christmas! - December 25 thru January 4**



In Your Seed Shall All Nations be Blessed

✠ "Now no longer are we led to believe by signs and types, but being confirmed by the Gospel story we worship that which we believe to have been done; the prophetic lore assisting our knowledge, so that we have no manner of doubt about that which we know to have been predicted by such sure oracles. For hence it is that the Lord says to Abraham: 'In your seed shall all nations be blessed' (Gen. 22:18); hence David, in the spirit of prophecy, sings, saying: 'The Lord swore truth to David, and He shall not frustrate it: of the fruit of your loins will I set upon your seat' (Ps. 31:14); hence the Lord again says through Isaiah: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive in her womb, and shall bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel, which is interpreted, God with us' (Is. 7:14), and again, 'a rod shall come forth from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall arise from his root' (Is. 11:1). In which rod, no doubt the blessed Virgin Mary is predicted, who sprang from the stock of Jesse and David, and fecundated by the Holy Spirit, brought forth a new flower of human flesh, becoming a Virgin-Mother."

St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome

✠ How could the human race go to God if God had not come to us? How should we free ourselves from our birth into death if we had not been born again according to faith by a new birth generously given by God, thanks to that which came about from the Virgin's womb?

–St. Irenaeus of Lyons

On the Word Made Flesh – St. Hippolytus of Rome (2nd C)

Our Faith is not founded upon empty words; nor are we carried away by mere caprice or beguiled by specious arguments. On the contrary, we put our faith in words spoken by the power of God, spoken by the Word Himself at God's command. God wished to win men back from disobedience, not by using force to reduce him to slavery but by addressing to his free will a call to freedom. The Word spoke first of all through the Prophets, but because the message was couched in such obscure language that it could be only dimly apprehended, in the last days the Father sent the Word in Person, commanding Him to show Himself openly so that the world could see Him and be saved.

We know that by taking a body from the Virgin He refashioned our fallen nature. We know that His manhood was of the same clay as our own; if this were not so, He would hardly have been a teacher who could expect to be imitated. If He were of a different substance from me, He would surely not have ordered me to do as He did, when by my very nature I am so weak. Such a demand could not be reconciled with His goodness and justice.

No. He wanted us to consider Him as no different from ourselves and so He worked, He was hungry and thirsty, He slept. Without protest He endured His Passion, He submitted to death and revealed His Resurrection. In all these ways He offered His own manhood as the first fruits of our race to keep us from losing heart when suffering comes our way, and to make us look forward to receiving the same reward as He did, since we know that we possess the same humanity.

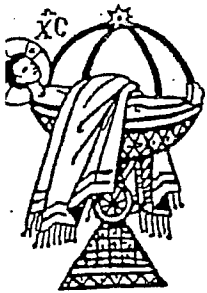
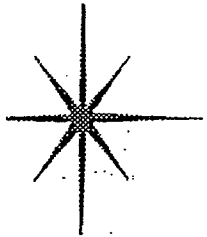
When we have come to know the true God, both our bodies and our souls will be immortal and incorruptible. We shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, because while we lived on earth we acknowledged Heaven's King. Friends of God and co-heirs with Christ, we shall be subject to no evil desires or inclinations, or to any affliction of body or soul, for we shall become divine. It was because of our human condition that God allowed us to endure these things, but when we have been deified and made immortal, God has promised us a share in His own attributes.

The saying "Know thyself" means therefore that we should recognize and acknowledge in ourselves the God Who made us in His own image, for if we do this, we in turn will be recognized and acknowledged by our Creator. So let us not be at enmity with ourselves, but change our way of life without delay. For Christ Who is God, exalted above all creation, has taken away man's sin and has refashioned our fallen nature. In the beginning God made man in His own image and so gave proof of His love for us. If we obey His holy commands and learn to imitate His goodness, we shall be like Him and He will honor us. God is not beggarly, and for the sake of His own glory He has given us a share in His divinity.

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**"CHRIST IS COMING TO RESTORE THE IMAGE
WHICH HE MADE IN THE BEGINNING"**

(Troparion of the Hours)



A MOST GLORIOUS MYSTERY

A homily on the Nativity of our Lord and Savior by Archbishop Philaret (+1985).

A strange and most glorious mystery do I behold: the cave is Heaven; the Virgin, the throne of the Cherubim; the manger, the place wherein lay Christ God Whom nothing can contain...

† † †

With these sacred words, in which the glad tidings of the great mystery of the Son of God are proclaimed, the Holy Church solemnly announces the radiant days of the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

They were heard first long before the feast itself, on the eve of another great feast—the Entrance into the Temple of the Mother of

God. And thereby the Church begins quite early on to prepare Her children to greet the Feast of the Nativity in a fitting manner

And if the holy hierarch Gregory the Theologian, speaking of our great feasts, refers to them as *mysteries*, thereby indicating the richness of their spiritual content and the exalted mysteries of the Faith which are disclosed therein, then perhaps this profound thought of the oecumenical teacher may be even more aptly applied to the feast of the Nativity of Christ, which is called *a strange and most glorious mystery*. And Paul, the preeminent Apostle, speaking in brief of the essence of our Christian evangelical task, said: *Great is the mys-*

tery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. (I Tim 3:16).

Blessed was the night of the Nativity. In the fields of Bethlehem the flocks grazed peacefully. And round about them were the shepherds, *keeping watch over their flocks by night.* (Lk 2:8). There is a tradition, according to which these humble and faithful laborers were conversing on the peaceful night about the exact time of the advent of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And suddenly the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

Man cannot encounter denizens of the world above without experienc-

ing fear and trembling; and the shepherds *were sore afraid.* Yet with what did the celestial herald begin his good tidings? *Fear not; for, behold, I bring*

you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10). And this great, this sacred joy the Church has received, and preserved, and proclaims to Her faithful children yearly during the radiant days of the Nativity of Christ.

Well nigh two thousand years have passed. For two thousand years the Holy Gospel has been proclaimed to the world; and therein the Church, yearly, over and over again, announces the glad tidings of the birth of Christ and takes up the angels' doxology: *Glorry to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). But does contemporary humanity pay it any heed?



On the night of Christ's birth when Heaven came down to earth and earth became Heaven, in that God appeared on it incarnate, only the lowly shepherds of Bethlehem heard the angelic doxology and worshipped the Newborn, according to the Gospel. All the rest of mankind slept a deep sleep, unaware of the great event that had taken away our sorrow-filled and trying days; many are those who sleep a sound spiritual sleep from which they do not wake, who do not hearken to the good tidings of the Church! They pay no heed to the angels' song; it does not touch them. And if it reaches them in church, it leaves no trace in their souls; they are lost in earthly vanity and are not mindful of heaven.

The holy angels sang of peace, *and on earth peace...* Truly it is thus! For He Whom the Prophet called *the Prince of Peace* came to earth: He came Who, when He bid farewell to His beloved disciples, said to them; *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you.* (Jn 15:27). Oh, if only mankind, which has lost peace, yet yearns for it and seeks after it, would but listen to these holy words of the *Prince of Peace* and ponder on them!

When the faithful Christians see the desperate attempts and efforts of the children and sages of this age to establish peace on earth in our time, they bring to mind the dreadful prophecy of the Prophet: *There is NO PEACE, saith my God, for the wicked.* (Isa 57:21). Nay, nor shall there be! And pathetic are all the attempts of the lovers of peace to attain an external peace!

It is not for naught that the Lord, after speaking of the peace which He bestows upon His disciples, added: *Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.* (Jn 14:27). And the Gospel tells us plainly that the Lord has said of the outward (political) peace for which the learned men of this age are striving: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.* (Mt 10:34). Therefore, in vain are the reproaches of those who maintain that Christianity has "failed," that it has promised men peace, but has not delivered it. For the angels chanted on the night of the Saviour's birth, and the Saviour Himself spoke, not of an outward peace, but of a spiritual peace, a peace between God and man, the peace of one's conscience, an inner peace. The Lord never promised an external peace; on the contrary, having foretold wars and rumors of wars, He added: *See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.* (Mt 24:6-7). He tells us that on earth there will never be that outward, political peace for which the propagandists are screaming.

The world is blind, has lost its senses, is entangled in its own passions and errors. Oh, if you could now but behold, see the light of knowledge, and understand what advances peace and your salvation.

Yet, alas! This is hidden from your eyes, for over them lies the impenetrable blindfold of vanity and the passions. The light of knowledge of God shines forth from the manger of Bethlehem, yet you do not perceive it; He Whose good pleasure it was to lie in that manger cries out to you: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28)—but you pay no heed to this saving call; you follow after your own wise men, of whom the word of God said long ago that "*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*" (Rom 1:22). And

with yet greater and greater clarity, one senses in you the fetid breath of the approach of the one who will rise up before you as the full and dreadful incarnation of evil, sin and opposition to God.

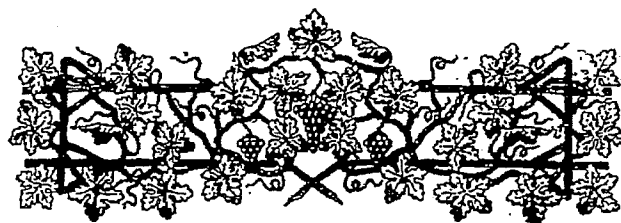
Once, in the early days of the spreading of Christianity, the holy Apostle Peter, warning the first Christians, cried out: *Save yourselves from this perverse generation.* (Acts 2:40). By *perverse generation* the Apostle had in mind the implacable foes of Christ among the Jewish nation, as well as the entire pagan world, which to a great extent was depraved and debauched.

Prior to the birth of Christ, paganism had already become obsolete and moribund, having completely lost sight of the true meaning and significance of life. Christianity brought the light of understanding to pagan peoples and gave them new powers—and in Christianity pagans were regenerated spiritually. But what we see now in our own times is incomparably worse and more perilous than what took place of old. Now the Christian world has become depraved. Christians have become depraved—those whom the Saviour commanded to be the light of the world, with the awesome warning: *Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savor, with what shall it be salted?* (Mt 5:13).¹

Is this not taking place in our midst, right before our eyes? Are not today's Christians turning into salt which has lost its taste?

Flee this dreadful spiritual destruction, O faithful child of the Church! Save yourself from this perverse generation! Lo! In these radiant days the Church commemorates the Nativity of Christ and glorifies the newborn Saviour of the world; make haste in your faith to the manger of Bethlehem, following after the simple shepherds, pure of heart, and the wise magi who laid all their wisdom and knowledge down before that manger. Bring your own gifts to the divine Infant—faith in Him, trust in Him, love for Him—and then in your faithful and devoted heart the wondrous doxology of the angels will sound: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!*

Metropolitan Philaret



We are the offspring of disobedient parents. When disobedience entered our fore-bearers, Adam and Eve, our nature suddenly changed. It became corrupt, foul-smelling, prone to decay, and mortal. Death entered us: Before the Fall, our fore-bearers were immortal. Only God can bring us back to our original state, as He created us. It was for this reason that He, Who is love, came down to earth and was born of the Virgin as a child. It is for this reason that He lived for 33 years among men. He wanted to teach us the truth, and show us that He is love.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)



THE MONASTERY OF SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK

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*Make ready, O Bethlehem! Open unto all, O Eden! Adorn thyself, O Ephratha!
For the Tree of life hath blossomed forth from the Virgin in the cave.
Her womb is shown to be a spiritual paradise,
wherein lieth a divine garden; eating from whence we live, not dying like Adam.
Christ is born to raise up His image which before was fallen.*

Beloved of the Lord,

We greet you all with the coming feast of the Nativity of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Each Nativity Season, we are reminded why God created man in the beginning: Man was created with the purpose and ability to see God and through this vision to share in God's own life and become eternal. The first-created man in Paradise saw God and this vision was his life. However, when man fell away from God, through his own will thereby introducing death into the world, God Himself came to resume the dialog that He originally had with man before it was broken by the fall. Not in a whirlwind, nor a threatening thunder, nor a flaming fire does the Lord our God come to man, thereby frightening him. No, God comes to us again this Nativity in the most accessible, most vulnerable and easily received way: as a Child.

As we begin to prepare to receive the God-man Jesus Christ this Nativity, the question we must ask ourselves is this: will we prepare ourselves in such a way, through fasting, confession, repentance, prayer, communion and almsgiving so as to be able receive this truth and thus be able to see Him? Or will we, like the rest of the world, fail to ready the eye of our heart and only see a quaint scene of a baby with his mother, being of no special significance to us, and pass it by as if it were of no consequence.

God is with us! He comes as a child to restore the image that is fallen, the image of God in us that needs healing, cleansing and salvation. Hence, we too according to the Lord's word, must become as children if we are to enter the Kingdom and God Himself even shows us the example and the way. In the midst of the busyness of our world, let us not fail to recognize the incredible, inexpressible Gift that is once again placed before us. God comes to re-inaugurate the vision of Himself which is salvation: to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. Let us receive this gift and in turn let us offer our life in return as our reasonable worship. Let us not turn away the Theotokos and St. Joseph from the Inn of our heart, crowded by the cares of life, but let us make ready to receive the One Who comes and will come again, seeing Him as He is: God-incarnate, the Word made flesh, the Prince of Life, the King of Peace and the Savior of our souls. Wishing you all a blessed Nativity Season,

In the new born Christ,

Igumen Sergius
Abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery

CHRIST IS BORN!

“...And the Whole of Creation Rejoices.”
CHRISTMAS 2013

To our beloved and very dear friends,

Christ is born – glorify Him!

In the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Judges, an angel of the Lord announces the birth of Samson to his old and barren mother. When she tells her husband Manoah, he entreats the Lord: “O Lord, I pray Thee, let the man of God whom Thou didst send come again to us, and teach us what we are to do with the boy that will be born” (Judg. 13:8).

This year, as we prepare to meet the Lord’s Anointed on Christmas Day, we ask the same question: “What shall we do unto the Child that shall be born?” Historically, there have been three answers to the question:

- I. Herod’s answer: *The answer of hostility* – “Let Him be destroyed!”
- II. The Bethlehem innkeeper’s answer: *The answer of secular preoccupation* – “There is a stable – they are welcome to it, if they care to use it, but that is the best we can do.”
- III. The answer of Simeon in the Temple: *The answer of commitment* – “What does it matter whether life be long or short? If it is to be a long day’s strenuous march, what joy, O Christ, to have Thy blessed companionship all the way! If it is to be a brief moment and a sudden call – ‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’”

All that we hope for lies in the power and love of our Lord. We trust that He be gracious, and we look to Him for His forgiveness, for His guidance, and for His imparted strength to obey Him. We thank Him that Jesus has come to bring to us all God’s blessings. Today may we honor Him by opening our hearts to everything that His worship may impart to us and through us to others.

With love in the Incarnate Christ,

†Archimandrite Ignatios

On the Approach of The Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

From a Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

Time is hurrying on and we are moving rapidly towards the day of the Nativity of Our Lord, towards one of the greatest, the most shaking events of human history. When a child is born into a family, with what awe, what expectation, what sense of exhilaration, and at the same time of fear, one expects the coming of this child. A child is coming, a new destiny is entering into the world, someone unknown hitherto; and this person will be the heir of all the past and carry the weight of all the present and shape the future.

This is true of every child that is born; and we are expecting a Child to enter into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, the Son of Mary the Virgin. He is a child of the total human family, and all the human family can receive Him and see this new destiny that has come. Looking at Him we can see two things which seem to be incompatible, and yet which are fused in one Person.

On one hand, we can see in Him the vulnerability of God, God in His frailty, God given to us, helpless, God loving us to the extent that He is prepared not to defend Himself, not to protect Himself, against anything which mankind has gradually made of itself, and which mankind will do to Him. And on the other hand, perhaps more through this frailty of God revealed to us, the frailty of love, we can see its greatness and we can fall down on our knees like the Magi, like the shepherds, like the angels of God, and adore the Almighty, adore the Living God, the Holy One of Israel who for our sakes gives Himself so unreservedly, so sacrificially to us.

A family expecting the birth of a child is full of awe and expectation; are we? And yet nothing greater has ever happened to mankind, to the whole cosmos, indeed, nothing greater is happening through His presence: God is in our midst, God part of humanity and part of the whole cosmos through His flesh. God in our midst, frail and saving us as love saves from hatred, from greed, from all things that divide and kill.

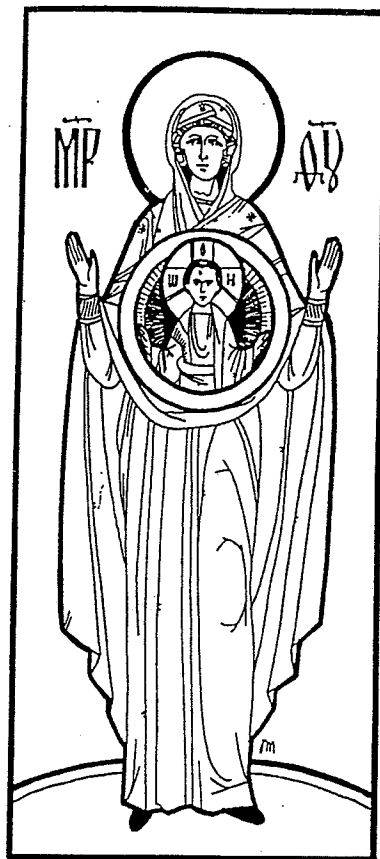
Are we waiting for this coming of the Lord with an open heart, with a tremulous and tender heart? A family expecting a child makes such preparations - are we preparing for the coming of the Lord? And I am not speaking of preparing ourselves in a pious way, in a church way, but with all the depth and perceptiveness of human hearts and human lives, ready to receive Him, ready to make Him welcome, ready to protect this frail and given love against all that can bruise, and break it and make it suffer.

And there is much in each of us that can bruise the divine love as it bruises the love, the friendship, the closeness of our friends, of those who love. We should have a look at our own selves and ask: is there within us a place where the Lord can rest, a home for Him? On the first Christmas night all doors were shut to Him, nothing but a cave was offered, nothing was prepared; is He coming into the world to find each of our hearts as barren, as closed - or as open as this cave where He can rest however poor the cave, but welcoming and warm and open, and longing to receive Him?

Let us reflect on that, and let us wait for the Child to be born into the world, into human history, into the vastness of the world, but also into the unfathomable depth of each of our souls. Amen.

**O House of Ephratha, the Holy City: the glory of the Holy Prophets.
Beautify the house: in which the divine One is born.**

(Stikhera of the Pre-Feast.)



SAINT NICHOLAS

On The Prefeast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ



(Taken from the Vespers on "Lord, I call" of the Prefeast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; celebrated on December 20)

Tone: 1

Let us celebrate, O People, the Prefeast of Christ's Nativity! Let us raise our minds on high, in spirit going up to Bethlehem. With the eyes of our soul, let us behold the Virgin as she hastens to the cave to give birth to the Lord and God of all. When Joseph first saw the mighty wonder, he thought that he saw only a human child wrapped in swaddling clothes, but from all that came to pass he discovered the Child to be the True God who grants the world great mercy.



Let us celebrate, O People, the Prefeast of Christ's Nativity; let us raise our minds on high, in spirit going up to Bethlehem. Let us behold the Great Mystery in the cavern, for Eden is opened once again, when God comes forth from a Pure Virgin, remaining the same Perfect God, and Perfect Man. Therefore, let us cry aloud to Him, Holy God, Father without beginning, Holy Mighty, Incarnate Son, Holy Immortal, the Spirit and Comforter, Holy Trinity, glory to Thee.!

Listen, Heaven, and give ear, O Earth: behold the Son and Word of the Father coming forth to be born of a maiden who has not known man at the good pleasure of the Father who begot Him before all ages. He is conceived by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit; Bethlehem, make ready; Eden, open your gates, for He who is comes to be that which He was not, and He who formed all Creation takes the form of a man, granting the world great mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Bethlehem, receive the indwelling of God; the Never-Setting Light comes to be born in you. Rejoice, Angels in Heaven; send up glory, men on earth; Magi, bring your glorious gifts from Persia; shepherds, begin the Thrice-Holy hymn with sweet melody. Let every breath praise the Creator of all!

Troparion: Tone - 4

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all! Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the Tree of Life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the Cave! Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit: if we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning.

