

**32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**  
**Sunday before the Nativity of Christ,**  
**of the Holy Fathers &**  
**Eve of the Nativity of Christ**  
**24 December / 6 January**



**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 7:** By Thy Cross, Thou didst destroy death / to the Thief, Thou didst open Paradise / for the myrrh-bearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy! / and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God / to proclaim that Thou art risen / granting the world great mercy.

**Sunday Before the Nativity of the Savior, Troparion, Tone II:** Great are the accomplishments of faith,/ for the Three Youths rejoiced in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest;/ and the prophet Daniel appeared/ a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep.// So by their prayers O Christ God save our souls

**Troparion of the Forefeast tone 4:** Once Mary, pregnant with a seedless pregnancy,/ was registered in Bethlehem with the elder Joseph,/ as being of the seed of David./ And while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered,/ but there was no room for them in the inn./ But the cave showed itself to be a beautiful palace for the Queen,// and Christ is born to raise up the image that fell of old!

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 7:** The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive, / for Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers. / Hell is bound, while the prophets rejoice and cry: / The Saviour has come to those in faith, / enter, you faithful to the Resurrection.

**Sunday Before the Nativity of the Savior, Kontakion, Tone I:** Rejoice O Bethlehem! Prepare yourself O Ephratha! / The Lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. / The God-bearing forefathers will rejoice beholding Him// and the shepherds will glorify her nursing Him.

**Kontakion of the Forefeast tone 3:** Today the Virgin cometh to give birth ineffably / to the preeternal Word in the cave. / Dance, O world! And having heard this, / with the angels and shepherds glorify // the preeternal God, Who is to appear as a little babe.

**Vespers readings:** Gen. 14:14-20; Deut. 1:8-11, 15-17; Deut. 10:14-21;

**Matins Gospel X**

**Epistle: Hebrews 11: 9-10, 17-23, 32-40**

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," Concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- Of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

## BY FAITH ABRAHAM OBEYED

Great indeed was the faith of Abraham ...It was necessary to go beyond human reasoning... to manifest also something more. For what was of God seemed to be opposed to what was of God; and faith opposed to faith, and command promise. I mean this: He had said, 'Get out of your country and from your kindred, and I will give you this land' (Gen. 12: 1-7) ...Do you see how what was done was opposed to the promise? Again He said, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called' (Gen. 21:12), and he believed: and again He says, Sacrifice to Me this one. who was to fill all the world from his seed. You see the opposition between the commands and the promise? He enjoined things that were in contradiction to the promises, and yet not even so did the righteous man stagger, nor say he had been deceived. For you indeed ...he promised rest and gave tribulation ...And he shows another thing too by saying 'God tempted Abraham' (Gen. 22:1). What then? Did not God know that the man was noble and approved? Why then did he tempt him? Not that He might Himself learn, but that He might show others, and make his fortitude manifest to all And here also He shows the cause of trials, that they may not suppose they suffer these things as being forsaken of God.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXV on Hebrews XI. 1, 2. B#58, pp. 477-478*

### Gospel: St Matthew 1: 1-25

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, And Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought 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 to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, And did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

As we approach the celebration of the feast of our Lord's birth, we are reminded that the incarnation was not something that was suddenly or casually approached by God, but something that had been in preparation since before the foundations of the world were laid. We see this preparation clearly in the remembrance last Sunday of the Holy Ancestors of Christ and this Sunday of the Holy Fathers who came before Christ. In these two Sundays we recall the physical and spiritual preparation of mankind and of the world for the coming of God in the flesh. God guided the course of the existence of the whole world so that it would come to a particular point of perfection. That peak of perfection is the Most Holy Virgin Mary. She is the product of generations of growth and refinement embodying the best possible effort of fallen mankind to fulfill our destiny to be like God. She is the perfect vessel put forth by the efforts of all of creation to receive the Son of God into the world.

When God created mankind, even then at the dawn of our existence, He already knew that He would become man and so draw all of mankind and the whole world into union and communion with Himself. With Adam and then Eve our first parents, He began this preparation, placing them in the worldly paradise of the Garden of Eden and communing with them daily so that they might more rapidly come to the place where they – and through them the whole world – were ready to receive Him in the flesh. But Adam and Eve sinned and departed from the plan of God, however, God did not give up His plan or abandon His creation. Even the fall of Adam and Eve into sin was used by God as an occasion to make His coming incarnation into an event of even greater glory by making it the means by which sin and death, brought into the world through the sin of our first parents, would be defeated and destroyed.

Throughout the whole of the history of the Old Testament we see how God gradually guided the course of the world, gradually molding and shaping fallen man towards the pinnacle of perfection through which He Himself would come into the world. From the very beginning we see God choosing righteousness over sin, teaching, by long and thorough lessons, what is good and what is evil. When the time was right, God chose a particular people, the patriarch Abraham and then Isaac and then

Jacob as the line from which He would draw this perfect vessel. The children of Israel, were then given the law to guide them and the prophets to ever push them into the application of the law. With each generation, the chosen people became more and more adept at living within the law and becoming as perfect as man was able to become on his own. Finally this progression towards perfection found its ultimate peak and its ultimate expression in the birth of the Virgin Mary who was the chosen vessel, the ultimate perfect human being produced by the efforts not only of one family or of one generation, but by the whole of the human race from Adam and Eve on through the Patriarchs and chosen people; again through the kings and priests and finally through the ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna. The Holy Virgin Mary was brought by her parents to the temple as an offering to God and the High Priest and Prophet Zacharias received her and by the grace of God saw her to be the perfect vessel, the pinnacle of perfection which the world had produced to offer to God. Thus the High Priest Zacharias led her not only into the temple, but placed her in the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the covenant had once stood for she would become the new Ark of the Covenant, the throne of God who would come into the world through her womb, be carried in her arms as though born by the Holy Angels and sit upon her lap as upon a throne.

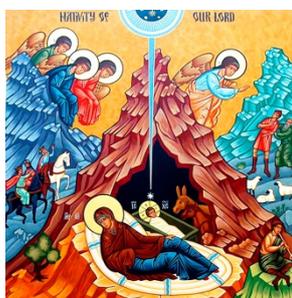
The Holy Virgin Mary is the peak of the perfection of the created world. She is the best that creation could ever offer to the creator. But even the perfection of the world, brought about throughout the whole span of history and with the guiding hand of God upon mankind was not sufficient to enter into union and communion with God. She could not, of her own essence bring forth into the world the God/man. As perfect and holy as she was, she reveals to us how far short the perfection of the world is when compared to the perfection of God. She shows us the great unbridgeable distance between the creature and the Creator. She is the pinnacle of perfection of the whole human race and of the whole world – but she was insignificant before God. In herself, she was as empty as the Holy of Holies in which she sat and prayed. That emptiness would have to be filled not by her, nor by another human being, but by God Himself. Only God could bridge the gap between Himself and His creation. Only God could perfect the imperfection of the human race by His presence. Only God could offer His own essence to the world. And so out of His love and His compassion He did all of this. God, seeing the perfection of the world offered to Him as a vessel for His coming into the world, accepted this offering as insufficient as she was, and filled the Holy Virgin with Himself through the Holy Spirit. In this moment, as the Virgin was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the life of God began to grow in her, uniting God with her own flesh and through her to the whole world. Accepting her as the ultimate expression of perfection of which the created world was capable, God made up that which was lacking by uniting Himself to the world through her. Through the Virgin Mary, He took flesh, became man, came into the world and dwelt among us. He Himself became the most perfect man that ever lived for only by uniting God and man could man ever be truly perfect. Even the most Holy Virgin Mary produced by the world after ages of refinement and labor as the highest expression of worldly perfection could not come close to the perfection which was brought about by the union of God and man. Nor can such perfection ever be overtaken by any effort of the world. Only by the union of God and man can men ever become perfect.

This then is our salvation, our perfection – that is the union of God and man, the perfect communion of the creature and the Creator. Having come into the world through the Holy Virgin our Lord showed that His perfection is available not only to the one who was perfect by worldly standards but to all men. He chose as His own disciples and apostles men who were not perfect, but who had their own flaws and deficiencies. By His grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He united Himself with them and those imperfections were overcome by the perfection of God and they were united with Him. Neither did He reject she who was the vessel of His coming into the world, but she also embraced His grace and the union and communion with Himself that He now offered to the whole world. This grace, because of her union with God as the instrument of the incarnation, found in her fertile ground and took root and grew to produce the most beautiful flower of paradise, the fragrant bloom of the Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary – glowing now not with the perfection of the world, but shining with the grace and perfection of Heaven. As this new perfection, she shines as a beacon for us of the grace and love of God, marking for us the path to the perfection of union and communion with God.

From the dawn of time and the first instant of the existence of the world, God began preparing a place for Himself in the world. Our first parents Adam and Eve were made by God as the crown and pinnacle of all creation and through them He began to prepare the means by which He Himself would be united to His creation. Even though they fell into sin, still God did not give up His plan to come into the world, but worked throughout all of our history to make His incarnation even more glorious and more triumphant. He guided mankind throughout all of history, choosing those who were righteous out from those who had given themselves up to evil. Choosing for himself a people, the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Choosing from among those people the line of priests and kings as those who would serve Him. He guided His chosen people by the law and the prophets leading them finally to the moment in all of history when the perfect human being would be produced by them – the Virgin Mary. And through her, He Himself entered into the world, spanning in His incarnation the chasm between creation and Creator that even the perfection of the world could not begin to bridge. The God/man Jesus Christ brought true perfection into the world – the perfection brought about by the union of God and man. He brought this same perfection, this same union and communion with God to all of us by sending down upon us the Holy Spirit. Freeing us from the enslavement to sin and death, by His own death and resurrection, He then offers to all of mankind union and communion with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this union of God and man, we too are able to participate and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the path is opened to us to rise to the heights of perfection brought about by the union of God with us surpassing the perfection of the world and entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Saints of the week

**24 December / 6 January — The Eve of the Nativity of Christ - **Strict Fast Day**** - Our Holy Mother, the Martyr Eugenia, and those with her - the daughter of Philip, Eparch of all Egypt, she was born in Rome. At that time, the Christians had been driven out of Alexandria and were living outside the town. The maiden Eugenia visited the Christians and received their Faith with all her heart. She fled from her parents with her two faithful eunuchs, was baptised by Bishop Elias and, wearing man's clothing, went to a men's monastery where she received the monastic habit. She so purified her heart by voluntary asceticism that she received from God the gift of healing the sick, and thus healed a rich woman, Melanthis. After this, though, the woman conceived a physical passion for her, not suspecting that she was a woman. Being firmly repulsed by Eugenia, this wicked woman, out of revenge, went to the Eparch and slandered her just as Potiphar's wife had slandered chaste Joseph. The eparch ordered that all the monks be bound and thrown into prison together with Eugenia. When they were brought out for trial, Eugenia revealed herself to her father as his daughter. The overjoyed Philip was baptised, with his whole household, and Philip was chosen as Bishop of Alexandria. Hearing of this, the Roman Emperor sent a wicked general, Terence, who, coming to Alexandria, secretly killed Philip. Then St Eugenia moved to Rome with her mother and brothers. In Rome, she fearlessly and zealously brought pagans to the true Faith, especially maidens, and thus brought a beautiful maiden, Vassilia, to the Faith. Vassilia was quickly beheaded for Christ, as Eugenia had foretold to her, and then her two eunuchs, Protus and Hyacinthus, were beheaded. Finally, martyrdom came to Eugenia, whose presence had caused the Temple of Diana to fall in ruins. The torturers first threw her into water and then into fire, but God preserved her. The Lord Jesus Himself appeared to her in the prison and told her that she would suffer on the day of His Nativity. And so it came about. She was beheaded with the sword on December 25th, 262, in Rome. After her death, Eugenia appeared to her mother in great glory, and comforted her. Our Holy Father Nicolas the Soldier; In E. Scotland, St. Caranus, bishop.



**25 December / 7 January — The Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ — **Fast-free period**** — 'And when the fullness of time was come, God sent His only-begotten Son' (Gal. 4:4), to save the human race. And when the ninth month had come after the archangel Gabriel appeared to the most holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured... thou shalt conceive and bear a son'—at that time a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus that all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire be taxed. In accordance with this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and there be inscribed. Therefore righteous Joseph came with the most holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal House of David. But, there being a great many people in that small city for the census, Joseph and Mary could not find a lodging in any house, and found shelter in a cave which the shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave the most holy Virgin gave birth to the Saviour of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bearing Him without pain, as He was conceived without sin of the Holy Spirit and not of man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling bands, worshipped Him as God and laid Him in a manger. Then righteous Joseph drew near and worshipped Him as the divine Fruit of a virgin womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshipped Him as Messiah and Saviour. The shepherds had heard a multitude of angels singing: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men' (Luke 2:14). At that time there also came wise men from the East, led by a wonderful star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh, and worshipped Him as King of kings, offering Him their gifts (Matt. 2:11). Thus He came into the world Whose coming had been foretold by the prophets and Who was born in the way that they had prophesied: of the most holy Virgin, in the city of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no longer in Jerusalem a king of the tribe of Judah, but Herod the stranger was on the throne. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind that could not be performed by His servants. May His be eternal glory and praise! Amen

Tropar of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 4): Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined upon the world the light of knowledge; for thereby, they that worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Kondak of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 3): Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. Angels with shepherds give glory; with a star the Magi do journey; for our sake a young Child is born, Who is pre-eternal God.

**26 December / 8 January— Second Day of the Feast of the Nativity - **Fast-free period** — Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos** - On the second day of Christmas, the Christian Church gives glory and praise to the most holy Mother of God, who bore our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This feast is called a 'general commemoration' because, on this day, all the faithful come together to glorify her, the Mother of God, and to celebrate a triumphant, common feast in her honour. In Ochrid, it has been the custom from time immemorial that, on the eve of the second day of Christmas, Vespers has been celebrated only in the church of the Mother of God, the Chieftain. All the clergy and people there together glorify the most pure Mother of God - Fast-free period - Commemoration of the Flight into Egypt- The wise men, astrologers, from the East, having worshipped the Lord in Bethlehem, returned home, at the command of an angel, another way. Herod, that wicked King, planned to slaughter all the children in Bethlehem, but God saw Herod's intention and sent His angel to Joseph. The angel of God spoke to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did this. Taking the divine Child and His most pure Mother, he travelled first to Nazareth (Lk. 2:39), where he set his household affairs

in order and then, taking his son James with them, went off to Egypt (Matt. 2:14). And so the words of the prophet: 'The Lord, riding upon a swift cloud, shall come into Egypt' (Is. 19:1), were fulfilled. In old Cairo today the cave where the holy family lived can be seen, and in the village of Matarea near Cairo, the tree under which the Mother of God rested with the Lord Jesus, where a miraculous spring of water sprang up under the tree. They lived in Egypt for several years, and then the holy family returned to Palestine in response to a command by an angel of God. And so a second prophecy was fulfilled: 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' (Hosea 11:1). Herod was dead, and on his bloodstained throne sat a worthy successor in his wicked son Archelaus. Joseph, hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Jerusalem, returned to Galilee, to his town of Nazareth, where he settled in his own home. Galilee was at that time ruled by another of Herod's sons, Herod the Younger, who was somewhat better than his wicked brother, Archelaus. Our Holy Father Evarestus; St Euthymius the Confessor, Bishop of Sardis; Our Holy Father Constantine of Synnada

**St. Tathai (Athán)** - nephew of Saint Samson of Dol. Hermit in Glamorgan, Wales. Founded the monastery at Llantathan (Saint Athan), Gwent. Founded the monastery school at Caerwent. Reputed miracle worker, he was noted for gentleness, love of the country, and for his generosity to travellers and the poor. Born in 5th century, Irish. Died in 6th century at Caerwent or Llantathan, Wales of natural causes.

Tropar of St. Tathai Tone 8: Teacher of true piety and blessed adornment of Christ's Church, O Father Tathai:/ as thou didst serve Wales with thy tireless endeavours,/ teach us, O Saint, the virtues of unshakable stability and loyalty to the true Faith,/ that at the end Christ our God will grant great mercy to our souls.

**27 December / 9 January — Third Day of the Feast of the Nativity - Fast-free period - St Stephen, Protomartyr and Archdeacon** - He was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in a Hellenic milieu. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons whom the holy apostles ordained for the service of the poor in Jerusalem. This is why he is called the Archdeacon—the first, or chief, of them. By the power of his faith, Stephen worked many wonders among the people. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but were always confounded by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit who acted through him. Then the shameful Jews, adept at calumny and slander, stirred up the people and leaders against this innocent man. They slandered Stephen, saying that he had blasphemed against God and against Moses, and quickly found false witnesses who supported their assertion. Then Stephen stood before the people, and all saw his face 'like the face of an angel': that is, his face was illumined by the light of grace as was the face of Moses when he talked with God. Stephen opened his mouth and spoke of God's manifold works and marvels, performed in the past for the People of Israel, and of the people's manifold transgressions and opposition to God. He especially denounced them for the slaying of Christ the Lord, calling them 'betrayers and murderers' (Acts 7:52). While they ground their teeth, Stephen looked and saw the heavens open and the glory of God, and spoke to the Jews of what he saw: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God' (7:56). Then the malicious men took him out of the city and stoned him to death. Among his murderers was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the most holy Mother of God was standing on a rock at a distance with St John the Theologian, and witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed for Stephen. This happened exactly a year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. St Stephen's body was taken secretly and buried by Gamaliel in his own ground. He was a Jewish prince and a secret Christian. Thus this first of Christ's martyrs made a glorious end and entered into the Kingdom of Christ our God. Our Holy Fathers, the Martyrs Theodore and Theophanes the Branded.

**28 December / 10 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 20,000 Holy Martyrs of Nicomedia** - In the time of the wicked Emperor Maximian Hercules, the Christian faith flourished in Nicomedia, and spread from day to day. At one time the Emperor, staying in the city, came to know of the large number of Christians, and he was greatly enraged and devised a means of slaughtering them all. The feast of the Nativity of Christ was approaching, and the Emperor, discovering that all the Christians gathered in the church on this feast, ordered that, on that day, the church be surrounded by soldiers and set alight. When all the Christians were assembled in the church after midnight and the glorious celebration was beginning, the soldiers surrounded the church so that no-one could leave, and the Emperor's envoy went into the church and told the Christians of the Emperor's command that they either immediately offer sacrifice to idols or all be burned to death. Then the archdeacon, a courageous soldier of Christ, aflame with divine zeal, began to encourage the people, reminding them of the Three Holy Children in the furnace in Babylon. 'Look, my brethren,' he said, 'at the table of sacrifice in the Lord's altar, and understand that our true Lord and God will now sacrifice on this; so shall we not lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?' The people were fired with enthusiasm to die for Christ, and all the catechumens were baptised and chrismated. The soldiers then set fire to the church on all sides and the Christians, twenty thousand of them, were burned in the flame singing the glory of God. The church burned for five days, and a smoke with a fragrant and intoxicating smell rose from it, and a marvellous golden light was seen around it. Thus these many men, women and children died gloriously and received wreaths of eternal glory in the Kingdom of Christ. They suffered and were glorified in the year 302. Our Holy Father Simon the Outpourer of Myrrh

**Saint Maughold**: Died c. 488. Said to have been a brigand or pirate, who was converted to the Faith by Saint Patrick, who sent him as bishop to the Isle of Man as expiation for his sins. Maughold is traditionally honoured as the Apostle of the Isle of Man  
**Saints Romulus & Conindrus**: Died c. 450. Romulus and Conindrus were among the first preachers of the Good News on the Isle of Man. They were contemporaries of Saint Patrick

Tropar of Ss Romulus and Conindrus Tone 4: By your holy preaching, Romulus and Conindrus,/ the Holy Name of Jesus was first heard in the Isle of Man./ As Heaven rejoices at the extension of the Orthodox Faith,/ pray, most holy fathers, that we may use our lives in Christ's service/ for the salvation of our souls.

**29 December / 11 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 14,000 Holy Children in Bethlehem** - When the wise men from the East failed to return to Jerusalem from Bethlehem to tell Herod about the new-born king, but, at the angel's command, returned to their home another way, Herod was as furious as a wild beast, and commanded that all the children of two years and under in Bethlehem and its surroundings be killed. This terrible command of the king's was carried out to the letter. His soldiers cut off some of the children's heads with their swords, dashed others on the stones, trampled some of them underfoot and drowned others with their own hands. The weeping and lamentation of their mothers rose to heaven: 'Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children' as had been prophesied (Jer. 13:15; Matt. 2:18). This evil-doing towards the hordes of innocent children came to pass a year after the birth of Christ, at a time when Herod was trying to find the divine Child. He sought Zacharias's son, John, meaning to kill him in the belief that John was the new king. When Zacharias refused to hand John over, he was killed in the Temple on Herod's orders. St Simeon the Host of God was also killed, and went to God soon after the Presentation in the Temple. Slaying the children in Bethlehem, Herod then turned on the Jewish elders, who had revealed to him where the Messiah would be born. He killed Hyrcanes the High Priest, and seventy elders from the Sanhedrin, and thus they who conspired with Herod to kill the new baby King came to an evil end. After that, Herod killed his own brother and sister and wife, and three of his sons. Finally, God's punishment fell on him: he began to tremble, his legs swelled, the lower part of his body became putrid and worms came out of the sores, his nose became blocked and an unbearable stench spread around from it. At the time of his death, he remembered that there were many captive Jews in prison, so, that they should not rejoice at his death, he ordered that they all be slaughtered. Thus this terrible ruler lost his inhuman soul and was given to the devil for eternity. Our Holy Father Marcellus; Our Holy Fathers Mark the Gravedigger and Theophilus the Weeper.

**30 December / 12 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - - Fast-free period - The Holy Martyr Anysia** - Born in Salonica of wealthy and eminent parents, she was brought up in the Christian faith. She was orphaned young, and gave herself over to pondering on God and prayer in her own home. Fired with the love of Christ, she often said: 'Oh, how false is the life of youth, for you either create scandal or are scandalised. Better is age, but oh, I am seized with sorrow at the length of time that separates us from heaven!' She sold her goods and gave away the proceeds to the poor, and herself lived from the labour of her own hands. She kept strict fasts, slept very little and always wept in prayer. When sleep overtook her, she said to herself: 'It is dangerous to sleep while the enemy keeps vigil.' At that time, the wicked Emperor Maximian issued a decree that any man was free to kill Christians when and where he came across them, without trial or sentence. This holy maiden once went out into the street to go to church. It was the day of a pagan festival of the sun. A soldier saw her fairness of face and went up to her with impure lust, asking her name. She made the sign of the Cross and said to him: 'I am Christ's handmaid, and I'm going to church.' When the impudent soldier came closer and began to speak as one deranged, she pushed him away and spat in his face. The soldier aimed a blow at her with his sword, and ran her through under the rib. This holy maiden suffered in 298 and was buried by Christians, and was crowned with a wreath of glory by God in the heavenly Kingdom. A church was built over her grave. Our Holy Mother Theodora of Constantinople; The Holy Apostle Timon; Our Holy Mother Theodora of Caesarea; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Gideon;

**St. Egwin, bishop of Worcester, (717), founder of Evesham Monastery** - Our holy father Egwin was born of royal stock in the region of Worcester. When he came of age, he left the world and embraced the monastic life, wherein he soon achieved a high standard of excellence. He was ordained through all the degrees of the priesthood; and in 693, on the repose of the bishop of Worcester, he was elected to the Episcopal see by all the clergy and the people, and with the assent of King Ethelred of Mercia and the archbishop of Canterbury. In this exalted position he showed himself to be a pattern of all virtue: a father of orphans, a protector of widows, a righteous judge of the oppressed and comforter of the afflicted. And by his powerful preaching many were converted from paganism or from an evil way of life. The righteous, however, must expect tribulation in this world, and malicious tongues began to war against the saint. He decided to travel to Rome and put his case before the highest tribunal in the West. But before leaving, and although he was innocent of the charges brought against him, he imposed a severe penance upon himself both for his own sins and for the sins of his people. He locked his feet in iron fetters and threw the key into the river Avon. Thus bound, he set off on the arduous journey to Rome. As he and his companions were passing through an arid region of the Alps, they began to thirst. Those among his companions who did not acknowledge the bishop's sanctity asked him mockingly to pray for water as Moses once did in the desert. But others, who did believe in him, rebuked the unbelievers and asked him in a different tone, with true faith and hope. The Saint prostrated himself in prayer to the Lord with his companions. On arising, they saw a pure stream of water gush forth out of the rock; whereupon everybody, believers and unbelievers alike, gave heartfelt thanks to God Who is wondrous in His saints. When they arrived in Rome and had prayed in the church of St. Peter, the Saint told his companions to go down to the river Tiber and see if they could catch a fish. They did as he said, and to their delight caught a medium-sized salmon which they brought to the holy father. When he saw it he gave thanks and ordered them to slit it open. Great was their astonishment when they found inside the fish the key which the Saint had cast into the river Avon. News of the miracle spread throughout Rome, and from all sides the faithful came to seek the holy man's blessing. Pope Constantine, who had heard of Egwin's arrival, the great labours of his journey and the miracle of the key, did not allow the Saint to prostrate before him, but himself asked his blessing. And for the rest of his stay in Rome he treated him with great respect, celebrating the Divine Liturgy with him and having many private talks together. The case against the Saint was examined and annulled, and he returned to England laden with honor. The people greeted him with joy, and by the decree of the archbishop he was restored to the see from which he had been dismissed. King Ethelred, too, received him with love, ready to fulfill whatever the Saint might petition. One of the Saint's first requests was to be granted the pastureland beside the Avon where he had thrown the key into the river. One of the king's shepherds had once had a vision at this same spot, in which a Virgin of extraordinary splendour appeared holding a hook in her hands and chanting psalms in the company of two other virgins, when the shepherd told this to the Saint, he turned it over in his mind for a long time, praying to God with vigils and fasting. Then, early one morning, after the Saint and three companions had spent the whole night in

prayer, they set out barefoot to the spot, chanting, psalms and hymns. Parting company with the others, St. Egwin fell to the earth with tears and groans. On arising from his prayer, he saw three virgins, of whom the middle one was most wondrous to behold, shining in light and surrounded by an ineffable fragrance. In her hands she held a book, and a cross which shone with a golden radiance. When Egwin realized that this was the Most Holy Mother of God, she, as if approving his thought, blessed him with the cross and disappeared. This vision gave the Saint to understand that it was God's will that this place, later called Evesham, should be dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary. And he determined to build a church there in accordance with a vow he had made during a period of especially fierce temptation. So he bought the land and carried out the task to completion, endowing the foundation with many gifts solicited from the kings of England. At his request, the Pope granted his undertaking independent status which was confirmed by a council of the English Church held at Alcester in 709. In 711 the Saint retired from his see and devoted himself exclusively to the government of his monastery at Evesham. With fastings and vigils, with tears and groans, he poured out his prayer to the Lord, and was accounted worthy of many visitations of the angels and the saints. He was particularly devoted to the Mother of God, whose praises were always on his lips. Already rich in years and Divine Grace, he fell ill in the monastery which he had founded, and, feeling the approach of death, he called together the brethren and said: "Most reverend and beloved sons, I beseech you, be zealous in observing the commandments of God, and keep the vows which you made to Him. For it is written: 'Make your vows and pay them to the Lord.' And as the Apostle says: 'Follow peace and holiness, without which none will see the Lord.'" Then, having commended them to the Father and having partaken of the Body and Blood of the Lord, he departed this life on December 30, 717. Great was the sorrow of the brethren and all the people. But during the burial of the Saint, sorrow at his departure was mixed with joy at his triumph. After his burial many miracles proved that St. Egwin had obtained great favour with the Lord. On praying to him, the blind were given their sight, the deaf their hearing, the sick in body and soul were healed. And so his fame spread throughout the country, and many came to his tomb to seek his intercession. Once a penitent, grieving over a serious crime he had committed, bound himself with a number of iron fetters. He vowed that he would not loose himself from them until God had shown him that he was loosed from the fetters of his sins. He dragged himself to several shrines of the saints, and after diligent prayer and fasting all but one of the fetters broke loose. The ninth fetter was fastened more tightly than the others, so that the flesh around began to swell. In hope of being released also from this one, the unfortunate man travelled to Rome, to the tombs of the holy Apostles. There, after heartfelt prayer, he was told in his sleep: "Go to England and seek the place of the blessed bishop Egwin, and when you have given him due veneration, you will obtain mercy," Joyfully, the penitent set off on his journey, and, arriving at the church of St. Egwin, spent several days there in prayer and fasting. One day, after the brethren had chanted the third hour and celebrated the Divine Liturgy, the ninth fetter snapped with such force that all the brethren heard it, and the penitent himself was thrown some distance as if by the hand of a man. When the brethren ascertained the truth of the miracle, they rejoiced and gave glory to God.

## REFLECTION

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshiped by shepherds and wise men (astrologers) from the east—the simplest and the wisest of this world. Even today, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Savior are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Perverted simplicity and half-learned wisdom were always the enemies of Christ's divinity and His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the east? This question was especially studied by St. Dimitri of Rostov. He claims that they were kings of certain smaller regions or individual towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. At the same time, they were erudite in the knowledge of astronomy. This wondrous star appeared to them, which announced the birth of the New King. According to St. Dimitri, this star appeared to them nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus, i.e., at the time of His conception by the Most-holy Theotokos. They spent nine months in studying this star, in preparing for the journey and in travelling. They arrived in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of the Savior of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, with long white hair and beard. He offered the Lord the gift of gold. The second was called Gaspar, of ruddy face, young and beardless. He offered the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthasar, of dark complexion and a very heavy beard. He offered the Lord the gift of myrrh. After their deaths, their bodies were taken to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Milan, and from Milan to Cologne. It can be added that these three wise men were representatives of the three main races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented the Japhethites, the Arabian represented the Semites, and the Egyptian represented the Hamites. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshiped the Incarnate Lord and God.