



31st Sunday After Pentecost

The Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ

25 December / 7 January



Tropar of the Nativity (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.

Kontakion of the Nativity (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.

Matins: Matt. 1:18-25

Epistle: Gal. 4:4-7

4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, „Abba, Father!“ 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME WAS COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God (I John 3:1), that we have been saved from sin (Matt. 1:21) and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the world which lies in evil (I John 5: 19). What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honour the fact that we are born of God; and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God and blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed. 'Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god' (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

St. John of Kronstadt,. My Life in Christ. B#61.

There is no need to fear that God should seem to suffer constraint in the tiny body of a child: for God is not in size, but in moral power ...That moral power, without changing for the worse, took to itself the rational soul, and through that the human body, and the whole man, to change it for the better; in condescension taking from it the name of humanity, in generosity bestowing on it the name of divinity.

St. Augustine of Hippo. Letters, 137.8. B#15, p.216.

He is God in that "all things were made through him and nothing was made without him." He is human in that he was "made from a woman, made under the law." The nativity of his flesh shows his human nature. The virgin birth is an indicator of his divine nature.

St. Leo the Great. LETTER 28, To FLAVIAN 4.

There are two words that he has set down so that the former may be interpreted by the latter, "for Abba" means the same as "Father." Now we see that he has elegantly, and not without reason, put together words from two languages signifying the same thing because of the whole people, which has been called from Jews and Gentiles into the unity of faith.

St. Augustine of Hippo. Epistle to the Galatians 31 (1B.4.6)

Gospel: Matt. 2:1-12

1 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.' 3 When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5 and they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. 9 When they heard the king, they departed: and 10, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

VISIT OF THE MAGI

What do the wise men learn from the star? ...That He was King of the Jews? And yet He was not king of this kingdom, even as He also said to Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world' ...And even if they knew Him to be a king, for what intent did they come? ...What had astrology to do with Him? ...What reason induced them to worship one who was king so far off ...not yet grown to manhood? Why do they set forth on so long a journey and offer gifts and this when dangers were sure to beset their whole proceedings? ...God called them by the things that are familiar ...and He shows a large and extraordinary star, so as to astonish them ...Yet for all that, God, for the salvation of those who are in error, endured to be served by these things whereby those without were used to serve devils (astrology); only He slightly altered them; that He might draw them off by degrees from their customs, and lead them towards the higher wisdom.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily VI on Matthew 2, 1,4. B#54,pp. 36,37,

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshipped by shepherds and wise men from the East-the simplest and the wisest of this world. In our day also, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Twisted simplicity and crazed wisdom have always been enemies of Christ's divinity and of His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the East? This question was closely investigated by St Dimitri of Rostov. He asserts that they were kings of small regions or groups of towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt At the same time, they were greatly learned in astrology. The wonderful star that heralded the birth of the new King appeared to them. According to St Dimitri, this star appeared nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus; that is, at the time when the most holy Mother of God conceived Him. They spent these nine months in studying this star, in preparing for the journey and in travelling. They arrived in Bethlehem very shortly after the birth of the Saviour of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, withered, with long white hair and beard. He brought the Lord the gift of gold. The second man was called Caspar; ruddy of face, young and beardless. He brought the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthazar; black-skinned and heavily bearded. He brought 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 represented the three chief races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented Japheth, the Arabian Shem and the Egyptian Ham. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshipped our incarnate Lord and God!

The Prologue, Vol. 4, p. 370

We must ask what it means that when our Redeemer was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds in Judea, but a star and not an angel guided the magi from the east to worship him. This was the reason: It was a reasoning being, an angel, who preached to the Jews as persons capable of using their reason. But a sign and not a voice guided the Gentiles, who were not prepared to make full use of reason to know the Lord. Hence Paul says that "prophecy has been given for believers not for unbelievers, but signs have been given for unbelievers and not for believers." And so prophecy has been given to the Jews as believers and not unbelievers, and signs have been given to the Gentiles as unbelievers and not believers. Note that the apostle preached our Redeemer to these same Gentiles when Jesus was already a grown man, but a star declared him to the Gentiles even when he was a small child, not yet able to perform the normal human function of speaking.

It was surely reasonable both that silent elements should preach him when he was not yet speaking and that preachers should make the Lord known to us by speaking when he was already speaking.

St. Gregory the Great. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES

Jacob was called the first Israel when he beheld the ladder and, on it, the "angels ascending and descending." He wrestled with the one who appeared to him. He heard him say, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel. By this name the entire people of Israel was called, as if by a name divinely chosen, setting them apart from other nations. Now, Israel means "a mind that sees God." Thus the church from among the Gentiles is also called Israel, not according to the flesh but according to divine grace.

St. Cyril of Alexandria. FRAGMENT II

Saints of the Week

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 (Athan) - 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.

‡ **Scripture Readings - Hebrews 2:11-18 (Theotokos); Galatians 1:11-19 (Holy Ancestors); Matthew 2:13-23 (Holy Ancestors) ‡**

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.

‡ **Scripture Readings - James 3:1-10; Mark 11:11-23; Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60 (Saint); Matthew 21:33-42 (Saint) ‡**

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 Outpurer 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.

‡ **Scripture Readings - James 3:11-4:6; Mark 11:23-26; Romans 8:3-9 (Martyrs); Luke 10:19-21 (Martyrs)** ‡

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.

‡ **Scripture Readings - James 4:7-5:9; Mark 11:27-33; 2 Corinthians 5:15-21 (Martyrs); Matthew 2:13-23 (Martyrs) ‡**

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.

St. Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia. - He was born in Moscow in 1492. When his father died, his mother became a nun and he a monk, receiving the monastic name Macarius. He became an iconographer of rare talent. In 1523 he was ordained to the priesthood and made Abbot of the Monastery of Luchski; three years later he was consecrated Archbishop of Novgorod and Pskov, a see which had been vacant for many years. As Archbishop, he sent missionaries to the native peoples of the far north of Russia and, within his own diocese strove against the paganism still common among the people. He regularized life in the monasteries of his diocese, which had fallen into self-indulgence. In 1542 he was elected Metropolitan of Moscow and head of the Russian Church. Five years later he crowned the first Tsar of Russia, Ivan Vassilievich. In 1551 he summoned the Council of the Hundred Chapters, which condemned various heresies prevalent at that time, laid down principles of Christian conduct and education, and established rules for iconography and Church art. Throughout his time as a hierarch, he continued to paint icons, and in 1553 he brought about the production of the first books to be printed in Russian. When the Khanate of Kazan fell, he immediately sent missionaries to convert the Tatars. When the Tsar, who revered Saint Macarius, asked him for a spiritual book, he was surprised and displeased to be given a copy of the funeral service; but the Saint told him that anyone who read this book carefully and applied its words would never sin.

Saint Macarius reposed in peace in Moscow in 1563, and his popular veneration began immediately. In 1988 he was officially glorified by the Church of Russia.

‡ **Scripture Readings - John 10:1-9 (Matins Gospel); 1 Peter 1:1-2, 10-12; 2:6-10; Mark 12:1-12; Hebrews 7:26-8:2 (St. Marcarius); John 10:9-16 (St. Macarius) ‡**

31 December / 13 January — Apodosis of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - Our Holy Mother Melanie the Roman - Born in Rome of devout and very wealthy parents, she was forced by them to marry a young nobleman, Pinian. She was taken very seriously ill in giving birth to her second child, and told her husband that she would be healed only if he vowed before God to live with her in future as brother and sister. Her husband agreed and Melanie, in her deep joy, was healed. When it pleased God to take both children to Himself, they agreed to sell all their possessions and give the proceeds to the destitute, the Church and the monasteries. They travelled through many lands and cities, everywhere doing good works. They visited famous spiritual guides in Upper and Lower Egypt, and received much instruction and inspiration from them. During all that time, Melanie lived in strict fasting, fervent prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. She followed the practice of reading the Scriptures right through, the Old and New Testaments, every three years, living with her husband as with a brother and fellow-ascetic. Going to Alexandria, they received the blessing of the Patriarch, St Cyril. After that, they went to Jerusalem and settled on the Mount of Olives. There Melanie became an anchoress, and gave herself completely to pondering, fasting and prayer. She lived thus for fourteen years, after which she came out, to help others to salvation, and founded monasteries for men and women. At the invitation of her kinsman, the senator Volusianus, a pagan, she went to Constantinople and brought him to the Christian faith (something that Blessed Augustine, whom Volusianus knew, had been unable to do). She then returned to the Mount of Olives, where she went to God in 438, at the age of fifty-seven.

Holy and Righteous Joseph, King David and James the Lord's Brother - commemorated on the Sunday after the Nativity of Christ. One can learn all about King David, the son of Jesse, from the Book of Kings. and for holy James see October 23rd. Righteous Joseph is so named in the Gospel (Matt. 1:19), and for this, God entrusted the most holy Virgin to his protection and gave him great honour in the economy of human salvation. Although Joseph was of the royal lineage of David, he himself was a simple carpenter in Nazareth. He took the most holy Virgin from the Temple into his home at the age of eighty, and entered into rest at the age of a hundred and ten. Our Holy Father, the Martyr Zoticus, Protector of the Poor; Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid.

‡ **Scripture Readings - 1 Thessalonians 5:14-23; Luke 17:3-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Matthew 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Matthew 3:1-11 ‡**

Words of Wisdom

"Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!" I will not try to convey this joy to you with my words; it is inexpressible by any words. The work that was accomplished by the Lord Who is born touches each one of us. Those who enter into communion with Him receive from Him freedom, healing, and peace; they possess all of this and taste of its sweetness. There is no reason to say, "Rejoice!" to those who experience this within themselves, for they cannot help but rejoice. But to those who do not experience it, why say, "Rejoice"? They cannot rejoice. No matter how much you say, "Rejoice at your deliverance" to one bound hand and foot, he will not rejoice. Whence can the joy of healing come to one who is covered with the wounds of sin? How can one who is threatened by the thunder of God's wrath breathe freely? You can only say to him, "Go to the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, and seek deliverance by Him from all the evils that encompass you, for this Infant is Christ, the Savior of the world. - St. Theophan the Recluse.

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