



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ December 25, 2011 ✠

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).

~ St. John of Kronstadt

The Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ

The Magi: Caspar, Melchior & Balthasar and the Shepherds

✠ Christ is Born! Glorify Him! ✠

The 12 Days of Christmas ~ Today thru January 4 ~ Fast-Free

⇒ Friday, December 30 - Nativity Potluck Party at the Ritchey's - 6:30pm

✠ Next Sunday - Feast of the Circumcision and St. Basil the Great

⇒ Saturday Vespers & New Year's Prayer Service - 6:00pm

✠ Feast of Theophany - January 5 and 6 - Vespers and Liturgy

✠ Blessing of Water and Blessing of Houses begins ✠

✠ Old Calendar Nativity - Saturday, January 7 - 10:00am

⇒ Sunday, January 8 - Children's Play (Life of the Theotokos)

& Visit from St. Nicholas

⇒ Sunday, January 22 - Ice Skating Party



Let the Heavens Rejoice and Let the Earth be Glad!

✠ "Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be exceedingly glad, for, of a truth, Angels and men are become one flock today. O Wonder! He that is invisible is seen, the Uncountainable is contained, the Beginningless receives a beginning; the Son of God becomes the Son of man; a Virgin that never knew man is seen to be the Mother of God; and - after giving birth - the Mother is found to be a virgin. The Incarnate Word of the Father reclines in a manger, and shepherds become preachers and partners of the mystery. Guided by a star, Wise Men from the East bring gifts, and they worship the new-born Savior. With them, O lovers of the Feast, let us readily open the treasures of our hearts, and offer Him good deeds - faith, hope, and love - as gold, frankincense and myrrh. And with the voice of the incorporeal powers, let us cry out to Him: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men; glory be to Him Who is come to save our race from corruption!"

St. John of Damascus (8th C)

On the Feast

✠ "For what else is the Feast, but the constant worship of God, and the recognition of godliness, and unceasing prayers from the whole heart with agreement? So Paul wishing us to be ever in this disposition, commands, saying, 'Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks.' Not therefore separately, but unitedly and collectively, let us all keep the Feast together, as the Prophet exhorts, saying, 'O come, let us rejoice in the Lord, let us make a joyful noise unto God our Savior.' Who then is so negligent, or who so disobedient to the divine voice, as not to leave everything, and run to the general and common assembly of the Feast?"

St. Athanasius the Great (4th C)

The Nativity of Our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ

December 25

The incomprehensible and inexplicable Nativity of Christ came to pass when Herod the Great was reigning in Judea; the latter was an Ascalonite on his father's side and an Edumean on his mother's. He was in every way foreign to the royal line of David; rather, he had received his authority from the Roman emperors, and had ruled tyrannically over the Jewish people for some thirty-three years. The tribe of Judah, which had reigned of old, was deprived of its rights and stripped of all rule and authority. Such was the condition of the Jews when the awaited Messiah was born, and truly this was fulfilled the prophecy which the Patriarch Jacob had spoken 1,307 years before: "A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him, and he is the expectation of the nations" (Gen 49:10).

Thus, our Savior was born in Bethlehem, a city of Judea, whither Joseph had come from Nazareth of Galilee, taking Mary his betrothed, who was great with child, that, according to the decree issued in those days by the Emperor Augustus, they might be registered in the census of those subject to Rome. Therefore, when the time came for the Virgin to give birth, and since because of the great multitude there was no place in the town, the Virgin's circumstance constrained them to enter a cave which was near Bethlehem. Having as shelter a stable of irrational beasts, she gave birth there, and swaddled the Infant and laid Him in the manger (Luke 2:1-7). From this, the tradition has come down to us, that when Christ was born He lay between two animals, an ox and an ass, that the words of the Prophets might be fulfilled: "Between two living creatures shalt Thou be known" (Habakkuk 3:2), and "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib" (Isaiah 1:3).

But while the earth gave the new-born Savior such a humble reception, Heaven on high celebrated majestically His world-saving coming. A wondrous star, shining with uncommon brightness and following a strange course, led Magi from the East to Bethlehem to worship the new-born King. Certain shepherds who were in the area of Bethlehem, who kept watch while tending their sheep, were suddenly surrounded by an extraordinary light, and they saw before them an Angel who proclaimed to them the good tidings of the Lord's joyous Nativity. And straightway, together with this Angel, they beheld and heard a whole host of the Heavenly Powers praising God and saying: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!*" (Luke 2:8-14).

All the Elements

"In truth, all elements bore witness that their Creator had come. Indeed, to speak of them in a human way. The heavens knew that He was God, because they immediately sent forth a star; the sea knew Him, because it allowed Him to walk upon it; the earth knew Him, because it trembled when He died; the stones and walls of houses knew him, because they were broken at the time of His death; the lower world recognized Him, because it gave up the dead it was holding; and yet the hearts of the Jews remained full of unbelief, and did not know that He was God, although all the dumb elements perceived Him as Lord." St. Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome (6th C.)

On Bible Translations and the Mother of God

How can we find words to describe the holiness, the purity, the sanctity of the one whom God selected to give flesh to the Son of God? St. Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit," (Luke 1:41) cried out, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!" (Luke 1:42). She also called her "the mother of my Lord." (Luke 1:43).

Yet today in our nation many Orthodox Christians do not honor the Mother of the Word. Some even accept the false teaching of all the protestant faiths: that our Lady was not "ever-Virgin." Part of the confusion among our faithful is the result of blatant errors in translating the Greek text into other languages. One such error is found in today's Gospel lesson. At the end of the lesson, a woman in the crowd joyously offers the following Spirit-filled words: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the breasts which nursed Thee," (Luke 11:27). According to all the mainline versions (King James, Revised Standard, etc.), Christ said in reply, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). This sounds as if the Lord is making light of the woman's praise of His mother, or even dismissing it. In actuality, however, He is agreeing with her! The key is the translation of the Greek word "menounge." The correct translation of this word is "of course," or "indeed," *not* rather. It is interesting to note that in two other instances where this word is used, the King James translators chose to give the true meaning:

1) "But I say, have they not heard? YES, INDEED." (Romans 10:18)

2) "But INDEED I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8)

Thus, in truth, the Lord is agreeing heartily with the woman's praise of His Mother. In essence, He is saying "Of course, my Mother is blessed! She is the most perfect example of a human being who hears and keeps the word of God."

Beloved! Not only did the Theotokos keep the word of God by her total surrender to His divine will for her (see Luke 1:38), she ALONE: kept THE Word of God within her tiny womb for nine months; gave milk to THE Word of God made flesh for another nine months; was established by THE Word of God as "More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim!" Is it not proper that all of us give honor to her who is "INDEED" honored by her Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ?

- Fr. Demetrios Carellas, Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA

A Question to Elder Paisios:

- Elder, some feel certain of this salvation and others have doubts. What is the proper stance?

The goal is for people to observe God's Commandments. The spiritual person must attain such a spiritual condition that even if God does not grant him Paradise, he will not be disturbed. We must realize well that today we are alive, tomorrow we may be gone, and we must be concerned how to be hear Christ. Those who have by God's Grace realized the vanity of this life have actually received the greatest gift. It is not necessary to be able to foresee the future, for it is enough to have the foresight to prepare for the salvation of the soul, and to take the best possible spiritual measures to be saved.