

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

December, 2013 - Volume XVIII, Issue 11

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese

From a Homily of Saint Peter Chrysologos

*died c. 450AD
Feast Day ~
2 December*

Inside:

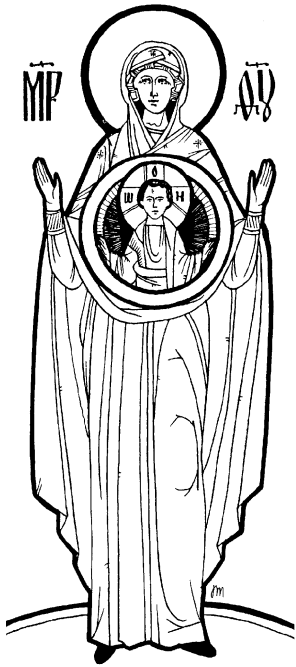
*St. Lucy..... 2
Hail Mary, full of grace.. 3
On the Birth of the Lord.. 5
Parish News..... 5
Calendar. 7*

How secret are the sleeping quarters of a king! The place where the nation's head, who is powerful, takes his rest is wont to be viewed only in a spirit of reverence and awe. No alien, no sullied man, no unloyal subject, gains access and entrance to it. How clean, how chaste, how faithful are the services expected there! The resplendent trappings of a royal court make all this clear to us. And what common or unworthy person dares to approach the gates of the king's palace?

Surely, no one is admitted to the inner chamber of a bridegroom except a relative or an intimate friend. He must be a man of good conscience, praiseworthy reputation, and upright life. Thus, too, it happens that God takes into His inner chamber only this one virgin; she alone, with her virginity unimpaired, is received there.

These examples, O man, are for your instruction. Realize from them just who you are, how great you are, and of what character you are. Then ponder this in your heart: can you fathom the mystery of the Lord's birth: Do you deserve to enter into the resting place of that bosom, where the heavenly King, with all the full majesty of His divinity, finds his repose? Ought you, as a rash witness with human eyes and bodily senses, to gaze on the virgin's conceiving? Can you, as a bystander, contemplate with daring reverence the very hands of God fashioning for himself the holy temple of a body within the womb of the mother? Can you by your gaze lay bare that mystery hidden through the ages, and unveil for yourself that sacrament invisible to the angels themselves? Can you act as an overseer in the workshop of the heavenly Artisan, so that you may clearly observe how God has entered the shrine of her unbroken flesh? Can you observe how without this virgin's awareness he has produced the outlines of his sacred boy in her venerable womb; how, without any

sensations on the part of her who was conceiving, He made firm those bones which will last forever, how, beyond any arrangement of man, He produced a genuine human form; how, without any fleshly desire, he assumed the whole nature of man; how, apart from the way human flesh operates, he has taken on its every quality?



Even if you did not enjoy free access to knowledge of all these marvels, would you think that God was unable at that time to assume from flesh what in the beginning he took from mud? Indeed, since everything is possible to God, and it is impossible for you fully to understand even the least of his works, do not pry too much into this virgin's conceiving, but believe it. Be reverently aware of the fact that God wishes to be born. Grasp by faith that great mystery of the Lord's birth, because without faith you cannot comprehend even the least of God's works... here is a matter which depends completely upon faith, and you want it to stand by reason. It is not, indeed, without reason that this matter holds true; it holds true by the reasoning of God, O man, not yours. What is so much according to reason as the fact that God can do whatever He has willed?

So, what God commands, an angel relates, his spirit fulfills it and His power brings it to perfection. The virgin believes it, and nature takes it up. The tale is told from the sky, and then proclaimed from the heavens. The stars show it forth, and the Magi tell it about. The shepherds adore, and the beasts are aware.

St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

Feast day ~ December 13

St. Lucy (Lucia) has been revered throughout the Christian world since at least the year 400 (the date of a reference to her found at Syracuse, the place of her martyrdom). Her name was included in the Canon of the Mass in the early Roman and Ambrosian rites; she was listed in early Greek and Latin liturgical books; and ancient churches from Greece to England bear her name. St. Aldhelm wrote about her in England in the 7th century.

The facts of her life are few: Born in Syracuse (Sicily), her father died when she was very young. Her mother, Eutychia, taught her the Christian faith, although she betrothed her at an early age to a young man who was not a Christian. Lucy, however, decided to devote herself to God in a life of celibacy and charity.

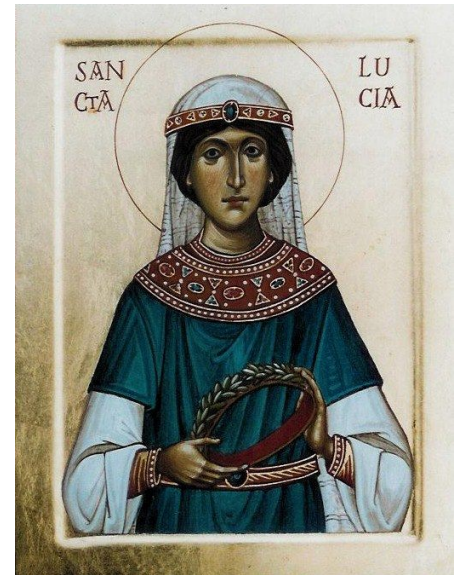
Like the woman healed by touching our Lord's garment, Eutychia suffered from a hemorrhage, and her daughter persuaded her to visit the tomb of St. Agatha to pray for healing. This she did, accompanied by Lucy, and when Eutychia received healing of her disorder, Lucy confided her decision to her mother. Eutychia gave her blessing and allowed Lucy to give her dowry to the poor.

The reaction of the betrothed was quite different. He was so enraged by this rejection that he reported Lucy's practice of Christianity to the authorities. The governor, Paschius, was intent on carrying out the persecutions of Christians ordered by the Emperor Diocletian, and he maliciously sentenced Lucy to life in a brothel. But God provided the young woman with the strength to persevere in her faith and also to resist being carried off by the soldiers. Many tortures were inflicted on her (including having her eyes gouged) and she was finally killed by the sword. Her martyrdom occurred in the year 304.

A similar thread is woven through the stories of many young women saints of this period (Cecilia, Barbara, Catherine, Agnes...) The ways of the world at that time were violently opposed to the Christian life: wealth was valued over generosity to the poor; sexual promiscuity was sought rather than virginity or marital fidelity; revenge was practiced rather than forgiveness.

The world today is just as it was then - violently, and often subversively opposed to the Christian life. May the example and the prayers of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, give us strength in our struggle to live that life.

[sources: Oxford Dictionary of Saints; Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church; Prologue from Ochrid; Butler's Lives of the Saints...]



Hail Mary, full of grace

While there are innumerable prayers for every conceivable condition in life, Christians most frequently turn to a few prayers as the most constant devotions for daily life. The prayer which our Lord taught his Apostles is, of course, the most commonly prayed - and the most perfect - prayer. In addition to the Our Father, the "Jesus Prayer" is used as a means of praying "without ceasing" as St. Paul instructs. The beautiful words of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation and St. Elizabeth's words at the Visitation of the Theotokos form the beginning of another prayer which is among those most frequently prayed by Christians through many centuries and throughout the world.



The scriptural texts: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” [Luke 1:28] and “blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” [Luke 1:42] had been included in The Gospel readings for the feasts of the Annunciation and the Visitation, as well as in chants for Advent and Christmas. By the early 11th century, these phrases began to be used together in monastic Marian devotions, and in the next two centuries, decrees of bishops in Canterbury, Durham and Paris show that it was offered as a private devotion for laymen.

These words used in prayer in the East (Greece, Russia, Serbia, etc.) are in slightly different forms, one of which is: “Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls.”

In the West in the Middle Ages, these verses were often used as a penitential formula, repeated many times and accompanied by genuflections or prostrations. This use led to the addition of the words “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” Also during this time, the prayer became associated with the ringing of a church bell - a call to prayer - in the evening (around 6:00 pm). Known as the Angelus, this practice was extended to morning and noon and its accompanying prayer expanded to include additional verses from the Annunciation and Christmas stories. At St. Gregory’s, we recite the Angelus after Sunday Liturgy.

The *Ave Maria* is also used in the recitation of the Rosary, a Marian devotion which developed from the 13th to the 16th centuries.

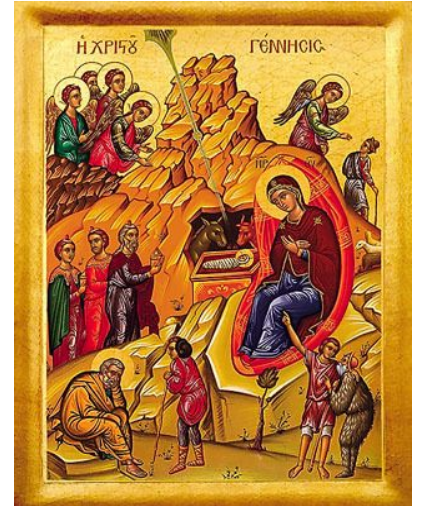
In praying the Hail Mary, we acknowledge God’s choice of Mary as the perfect one for bearing the Savior of the world. God chose her because she was “full of grace”. We also affirm the Church’s teaching that Mary is the “Mother of God”, that Jesus is truly God and truly man, joining heaven and earth in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And we understand that Mary will intercede for us when we ask.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

On the Birth of the Lord

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid

The only-begotten Son of God, my brethren, begotten in eternity of the Father without a mother, was born in time of a Mother without a father. That first begetting is an unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity in eternity, and this second birth is an unfathomable mystery of God's power and love for mankind in time. The greatest mystery in time corresponds to the greatest mystery in eternity. Without probing with the light of our small understanding into this greatest of mysteries, let us be content, my brethren, with the discovery that our salvation had its origin not from men nor from the earth but from the greatest heights of the invisible, divine world. Such is God's mercy and such is man's greatness, that God the Son Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherd's cave, solely to save man, to cleanse him from sin and to lead him back to Paradise. *I came forth from the Father*, where He had everything, *and am come into the world*, that could give Him nothing. The Lord was born in a cave, to show that the whole world is a dark cave that only He can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem - the "House of Bread" - to show that He is the only Bread of life worthy of true men.



O Lord Jesus, the pre-eternal Son of the living God and Son of the virgin Mary, enlighten us and nourish us with Thyself. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Parish News

St. Gregory's has been blessed with the gift of a relic of St. Lucy, which was first offered for veneration on All Saints Day. Along with those of St. Gregory the Great, our patron, St. Nicholas, and St. Sebastian, her relics are kept on the altar at all times as a reminder of the communion of saints and that she and all the saints will intercede for us in heaven.

The season of Advent, beginning on Sunday, December 1, is a time of preparation. While the world hurries around us in its frenzy of spending and partying, we should be heeding our Lord's admonition: "Watch, for ye do not know what hour your Lord is coming." [Matt 24:42] We watch and prepare not only to celebrate the coming of our Lord to earth as a little child but also his coming at the end of time on the Day of Judgement. We prepare not only by giving presents, decorating, and singing carols but we prepare

our hearts to meet the Messiah who came to save us from our sins and lead us back to heaven. Advent is also the beginning of the Church year on the western calendar.



There are many changes which appear in the church for the season of Advent. The vestments will now be purple, the color for penitential times; the readings for Vespers, Matins and Mass will concentrate on the theme of repentance and being ready (with St. John the Baptist - the forerunner - prominent in the readings); the hymns and choir chants will continue this theme. It is our custom to change the musical settings for the Ordinary of the Mass (Kyrie, etc.) to that of the Missa Marialis and the proper Office hymns and Marian anthems also change with this season. All these things will help to focus our attention on the coming of our Lord.

As part of our Advent preparations, we will resume our annual “Food for the Hungry” collection. Please bring canned and packaged food to share with those in our community who are in need. This year, we are also assembling Health Kits for International Orthodox Christian Charities. Items collected will be sent to aid those in the Philippines who have lost so much or in other parts of the world suffering from natural disasters or war.

Please speak to Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael to schedule making your confession before Christmas. This is an important part of our Orthodox life and another means for preparing for the celebration of the Incarnation.

The Advent fast should be observed thoughtfully and prayerfully. If you need help in determining what would be best for you and your family, please speak with Fr. Nicholas.

A service of Advent Lessons and Carols will be offered at 6:00 pm on Saturday, December 20, in place of our usual Vespers service. The readings of Old Testament prophecies and of the events leading up to the birth of Our Lord call our minds to focus on the true meaning of this season - that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” [John 1:14] This is a good time to invite family or friends to come to church with you.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, confessions will be heard from 8:30 - 9:30 pm and the first Mass of Christmas will be celebrated at 10:00 pm. On Wednesday, January 1, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord, Liturgy will be at 10:00 am, preceded by Matins at 9:30 and followed by a pot-luck brunch.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| <h1>December 2013</h1> | | | | | | <i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i> |
| 1 First Sunday of Advent; St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660 <i>V</i> | 2 St. Peter Chryso- logus, BCD, c. 450 | 3 St. Bibiana of Rome, VM, 363 | 4 St. Barbara, VM, c. 306; St. Clement of Alexandria, CD, c. 210 | 5 St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532 | 6 St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342 | 7 St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 8 Second Sunday of Advent <i>V</i> | 9 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (transferred) | 10 St. Mel- chiades, PM, 314 | 11 St. Dam- asus, PC, 384 | 12 St. Spi- ridon, BC, 348 | 13 St. Lucy, VM, 304 St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837 | 14 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 15 Third Sunday of Advent; St. Maurus, Ab, 6th c. <i>V</i> | 16 St. Euse- bius of Vercelli, BM, 371 <i>O Sapientia</i> | 17 St. Laza- rus of Bethany, BC, 1st c. <i>O Adonny</i> | 18 Ember Wednesday <i>O Radix Jesse</i> | 19 <i>O Clavis David</i> | 20 Ember Friday; St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908 <i>O Oriens</i> | 21 St. Thomas, Apostle, 1 st c.; Ember Saturday <i>Lessons & Carols at 6pm O Rex gentium</i> |
| 22 Fourth Sunday of Advent <i>O Emmanuel</i> <i>V</i> | 23 <i>O Virgo virginum</i> | 24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>Mass at 10pm</i> <i>W</i> | 25 The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Anastasia, VM., c. 304 | 26 St. Stephen, Proto-martyr, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity | 27 St. John, Evange- list & Apostle, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity | 28 Holy Innocents, Mm, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 29 Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity <i>W</i> | 30 of the Octave of the Nativity | 31 St. Syl- vester, PC, 335; of the Octave of the Nativity | 1 The Cir- cumcision of Our Lord and Octave of the Nativity <i>Mass at 10am</i> <i>W</i> | 2 Octave Day of St. Stephen; St. Fulgentius, BC, 533 | 3 Octave Day of St. John, Ap. Ev.; St. Genevieve, V, 512 | 4 Octave Day of the Holy Innocents, Mm; St. Titus, BC, c. 96 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |

Confessions are heard during the Psalms at Matins, after Vespers, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Mass. Sunday School during coffee hour.