

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

December, 2020 - Volume XXV, Issue 11

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
13407 Roxbury Rd., Silver Spring, MD - stgregoryoc.org

From a
Homily by
St. Leo the
Great
d. 461

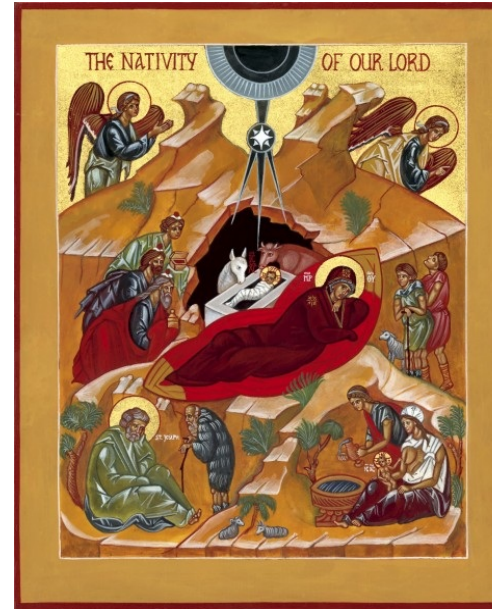
This is the day our Savior was born: what a joy for us, my beloved! This is no season for sadness, this, the birthday of Life - the life which annihilates the fear of death, and engenders joy, promising, as it does, immortality.

Nobody is an outsider to this joy is common to all, for as our Lord found nobody free from guilt when he came to bring an end to death and to sin, so he came with redemption for all. Let the saint rejoice, for he hastens to his crown; let the sinner be filled with joy, for pardon is offered him; let the Gentile be emboldened, for he is called to life.

When the designated time had come, which God in his deep and impenetrable plan had fixed upon, God's Son

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took the nature of man upon himself in order to reconcile man to his Creator. Thus would the devil, the father of death, be himself overcome by that self-same human nature which he had overcome.

The angels therefore exult at the birth of the Lord: they sing *Glory to God in high heaven*; they announce *Peace on earth for men on whom his favor rests*. For they behold the

heavenly Jerusalem being constructed from out of all the peoples on earth. How greatly ought mere men rejoice at this mysterious undertaking of divine love, when the angels on high thrill so much at it!

My beloved, let us offer thanksgiving to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. In the great mercy with which he loved us, he had pity on us, and *in giving life to Christ, gave life to us too, when we were dead through sin*, so that in him we might be a new creation, a new work of his hands.

Let us then be quit of the old self and the habits that went with it. Sharers now in the birth of Christ, let us break with the deeds of the flesh.

O Christian, be aware of your nobility - it is God's own nature that you share: do not then, by an ignoble life, fall back into your former baseness. Think of the Head, think of the Body of which you are a member. Recall that you have been rescued from

the power of darkness, and have been transferred to the light of God, the kingdom of God.

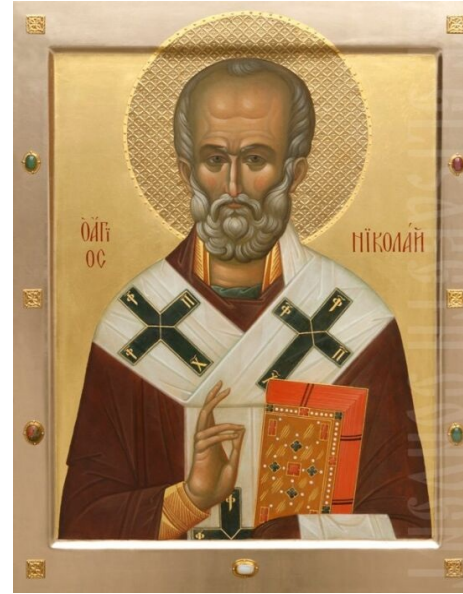
St. Nicholas of Myra

Feast Day ~ December 6

It must have seemed a long way from being in prison, awaiting certain torture and probable execution for being a Christian during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian to the freedom to worship openly when Emperor Constantine issued the Edit of Milan in 313. It also seems a long way from a devoted bishop of the Church, whose concern was for the poor, to the image of a fat, jolly elf in a red suit, carrying a huge bag of toys for the children of the world! Those two extremes represent St. Nicholas, whose feast day is December 6.

There are not many historical facts about the life of St. Nicholas, but the few that exist, added to the innumerable legends about this much-loved saint, give us a picture which is probably fairly accurate. He was born around 270 in Lycia to Christian parents and was educated in the faith by his uncle, also Nicholas, bishop of Patara, who ordained him to the priesthood when he had reached the canonical age.

The priest Nicholas became known for his charity toward those in need and his love of children. When he discovered that a parishioner who was a widower with three daughters had suffered some financial difficulties and was unable to provide his daughters with the expected dowry, Nicholas stepped in to help. Not wanting to call unnecessary attention to himself during this dangerous time of persecution and also not wanting to embarrass the young women, he devised a way to secretly accomplish what was needed. On three separate nights, he managed to throw three bags of gold coins in a window of the family's home, thus surprising the young



women and providing them with the opportunity for suitable marriages. This story is no doubt the basis for the manner in which the modern “St. Nick” or Santa Claus, delivers his gifts.

Nicholas went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and was so moved by being at the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord that he wished to remain in Jerusalem and make a monastic cell for himself. But God made known to him

that there was another plan for his life back in his own country. Upon his return, Nicholas was elected to be the bishop of the nearby city of Myra.

During the persecutions of Christians in the reign of Emperor Diocletian, the bishop was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for refusing to deny Christ. After Diocletian abdicated the throne in 312, Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, releasing all religious prisoners and Bishop Nicholas returned to be the shepherd of his flock.

St. Nicholas attended the Council of Nicea, called in 325 by the Emperor to settle the Christological issues which were disrupting the peace of the Church. (Bishop Nicholas is listed as number 151 out of an approximate 300 participants in the list of Theodore the Lector, who must have been appointed as the one to keep the attendance roll.) A story from this time may be apocryphal, but it serves as a testimony to St. Nicholas' adherence to the Orthodox understanding of the revelation of Christ as both God and man. As the story goes, mild-mannered Bishop Nicholas

was so upset by the heretical arguments of Arius that he lashed out and hit him! For this uncharacteristic - and unacceptable - action, the bishop was banned from the Council and stripped of his office. However, several of the hierarchs in attendance had the same dream that night: Our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Mother appeared with Nicholas, returning his episcopal garments. The next day, the bishop was reinstated as a participant in the Council and was viewed with greater respect by all.

Other stories depict St. Nicholas as a wonder-worker, who saved sailors from certain death at sea, who saved innocent soldiers from wrongful execution, who saved children from murder. Devotion to St. Nicholas led the Emperor Theodosius II, who reigned from 401-450, to build a church in Myra dedicated to the saint. In the next century, Emperor Justinian renovated churches dedicated to him in Constantinople.

Satan always manages to find the vulnerable places in the lives of Christians, to do everything in the power God allows him to have to attempt to harm the Church. In 1087 - when the effects of the Great Schism of 1054 were just beginning to be realized in Italy and Turkey, and the Greek Christians of Asia Minor became subject to Muslim rulers - a group of Italian sailors raided the church in Myra and stole most of the relics of St. Nicholas! They took them to Bari where a new cathedral was built to house the relics. Not to be outdone by sailors from another Italian city, in 1100, Venetians sailors (on the way to the first Crusade) went to Myra and stole the remaining relics of the beloved saint.

Centuries later, with improved attitudes and through the diplomatic negotiations of Roman Catholic and Orthodox hierarchs as well as government leaders, progress has been made toward offering the relics of St. Nicholas for veneration by more people. In 1966, in recognition of the lifting of the anathemas of 1054, an Orthodox chapel was dedicated in the crypt under the Roman Catholic Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari.



In the Church, we still venerate St. Nicholas as a holy bishop, one who was faithful to Christ despite persecution, one who was generous to the poor, one who used his God-given abilities to save others from harm. We know that he is not a Greek or Italian or Turkish saint, whose relics are to be fought over, and we know that he is not a fat elf who satisfies the materialistic desires of children.

May we work to present the world with a better, more accurate image of this holy man and may St. Nicholas intercede for us as we struggle against the works of the devil. *Holy Nicholas, pray for us.*

Parish News

As we continue to experience restrictions due to the Covid virus, it is important that we keep connected to each other and to our parish preparations for the celebration of the Nativity. During Advent, Fr. Nicholas will offer Vespers many evenings at 6PM; the readings and antiphons are helpful for preparing our hearts. Saturday Vespers and the Sunday Mass will be live-streamed for watching at home but also in the parish hall when there are more than the allowed twelve people in attendance in the chapel. At Masses, Communion will be brought upstairs for those people. In addition, we will have Mass on Thursday, December 3 (Eve of St. Barbara), on Monday, December 7 (Eve of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and Thursday, December 17.

On Christmas Eve, both Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Raphael will be available for confession beginning at 8:30PM (or by appointment at other times). At 9:45, there will be a time for Christmas music for choir and organ, and carol-singing by the congregation. The first Mass of Christmas will be celebrated at 10PM. (Unfortunately, we will not be able to have our usual wonderful feast afterward.) On Christmas Day, Mass will be celebrated at 10AM (with Matins at 9:30). Please let Fr. Nicholas know which of these services you wish to attend.

Even though many people are weary of “zoom” work, meetings, and church services, this technology has allowed us to have virtual “coffee hours,” to see those we don’t see in church and to have conversations. There will be zoom coffee hours on December 13 and 27. Zoom Sunday School classes are being offered for the children.



Waiting, Remembering, Hoping

by Metropolitan PHILIP

In our depths lies the message of waiting, remembering, and hoping. Spiritual growth and incarnation do not happen but by patient struggle; like life itself, they do not occur on schedule. Few things worthwhile happen suddenly. We wait for birth. We wait for love, We wait for life. We wait for such occurrences to reveal their meaning for us, time after time, fall upon fall, hope after hope, experience by experience. We wait for the light of God to enter the darkness of our lives, to flow through our depths, bringing new light into birth. We wait for the grace of Christ to engage our hearts again through the Spirit. We wait for incarnation...

To wait means that our hope has meaning and substance. To wait is to proclaim that there is something more for which to hope, that life is never all it should or can be, that there is an “up ahead,” a “what is not yet” range of life. To wait is not to say that the present, or even the past is not important. Rather, it is to know that there is a directivity, a drive in life, in which “what is not yet” is already buried in what is. In a sense, it means that there are unrealized possibilities for spiritual growth buried in us now, in the present, and these are calling us continually to incarnate them...

To wait is to look for transformation, because growth is not something in which we merely add on the new to the present. To grow is to transform the old, not by wiping it out but by renewing it with new force and vitality.

To wait is to fight the desire merely to rest, to drowse, not to struggle, not to watch. To wait is to allow spiritual entropy. To wait is not simply stagnation; rather it is active expectation...

Through waiting and expectation we declare ourselves, we proclaim our attention and directivity, we offer ourselves sin

waiting for that which is yet to come. We watch, and this is the evangelical precept of the Fathers: watchfulness...



But such experiences of waiting and expectation, of watching and declaration, are empty if not conditioned by one more factor: memory. We wait for something, expect someone; we watch and declare our hope that we wait for the “what is not yet.” The Christian holds the waiting experience of the desert in his depths because he remembers: something, someone, for whom to wait. And he remembers there in his depths.

Buried in our depths is indeed the memory of another. This memory is connected to prophecy and presence. Jesus was recognized as the Christ only because someone remembered the prophecy and beheld a star. He was known by those who waited in the expectation and hope that the time for deliverance was finally present; the Incarnation was awaited.

An excerpt from Meeting the Incarnate God, by Metropolitan PHILIP and Fr. Joseph Allen. Sayedna Philip was the Metropolitan of the Antiochian Archdiocese from 1966 until his death in March 2014.



St. Gregory Orthodox Church
c/o 804 E Randolph Rd
Silver Spring, MD 20904
Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2020</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>		1 St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660	2 St. Peter Chrysologus, BCD, c. 450; St. Bibiana of Rome, VM, 363	3	4 St. Barbara, VM, c. 306	5 St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
6 Second Sunday in Advent; St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342 ✓	7 St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397	8 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	9	10 St. Melchisedes, PM, 314	11 St. Damasus, PC, 384	12 St. Spiridon, BC, 348 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
13 Third Sunday in Advent; St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837 ✓	14	15 St. Maurus, Ab, 6th c.	16 Ember Wednesday St. Eusebius of Vercelli, BM, 371 <i>O Sapientia</i>	17 St. Lazarus of Bethany, BC, 1st c. <i>O Adonny</i>	18 Ember Friday <i>O Radix Jesse</i>	19 Ember Saturday <i>O Clavis David Vespers at 6pm</i>
20 Fourth Sunday in Advent; St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908 <i>O Oriens</i> ✓	21 St. Thomas, Apostle, 1st c. <i>O Rex gentium</i>	22 <i>O Emmanuel</i>	23 <i>O Virgo virginum</i>	24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>Mass at 10pm</i> W	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 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
27 St. John, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st c.; Sun. after the Nativity; of the Octave of the Nativity W	28 Holy Innocents, Mm, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	29 of the Octave of the Nativity	30 of the Octave of the Nativity	31 St. Sylvester, PC, 335; of the Octave of the Nativity		