

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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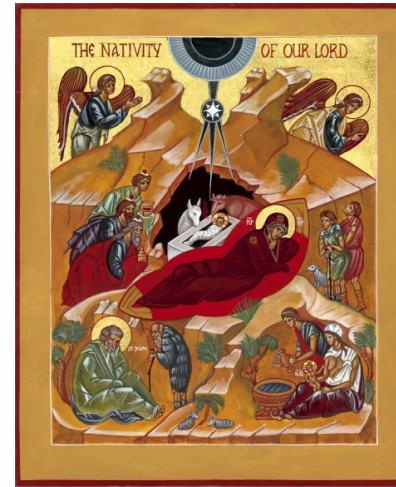
From a homily by St. Nikolai of Ochrid d. 1956

The unbeliever will say in his soul: “He promised to come two thousand years ago, and He still has not come!” Thus they mock, who will wail in eternal torment. But we who are being prepared for joy in His Kingdom know that He will come in power and glory, as He promised.

We know that He has come times without number already, and shown Himself to His faithful people. Did He not come to John the divine, to whom He spoke these words; “Behold, I come quickly”? John saw Him in power and glory and felt His hand upon him, when he was fearful and fell at His feet as one dead. “And He laid His right hand

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on me.” Did not He come to Saul when he was breathing out hatred upon the Christians and when he fell to the ground on the road to Damascus, seeing the Lord and hearing His voice: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” And, again, did He not come into the heart of the Apostle Paul when he acknowledged: “I live; yet, not I, Christ liveth in me”? And did He not come to innumerable martyrs for His name, to encourage them, heal them and have mercy on them?

Did He not appear to Antony the Great, to Theodore Stratelates, St. Charalampus, St. Marina, St. Sylvester and so many, many others?

What more shall we say? Did not He return on the third day from the kingdom of the dead and come to the apostles? And has He not come time after time to the Church's aid and raised her as from the dead whenever His enemies thought exultantly that they had delivered His Church over to death for ever? Did He not show His power in the Church in the time of Nero as much as in the time of Constantine; in the time of Julian as in the time of Justinian, in the time of Arab oppression as in the time of Turkish and Mongol oppression of Christians?

Oh, my faithful brethren, don't let yourselves be deceived. He has come times without number, and comes today. He comes to every soul that is accessible despite its impurity. However, we all await His last coming in power and glory. And we know that His coming is sure.

Omost gracious Lord, before Thou comest make us worthy to behold Thy face, and make our faces ashamed, darkened as they are by sin. To thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

St. Valerian, Bishop & Martyr

Feast Day ~ December 15



The martyrs of the Church are so numerous that for many, very few facts remain about their lives before they were put to death for their faith. What is celebrated is the courage with which they maintained that faith in the face of persecution, torture, and execution.

In the early centuries of the Church when the practice of Christianity was an illegal departure from the norm of the Roman Empire, and later when Christians veered from the faith of the Apostles into heretical views, those who remained steadfast in professing Orthodox truth were persecuted cruelly.

One about whom we know very little except for his persecution and death is St. Valerian, bishop of Abbenza in North Africa when the Vandals ruled. King Genseric, who was an Arian, was determined to make all Christians under his rule conform to the heresy that Christ was not truly divine, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity.

In the year 457, St. Valerian was ordered by Genseric to turn over the sacred altar vessels of his church and, when the bishop refused, Genseric exiled him from the city and diocese and forbade anyone to give him assistance. Bishop Valerian was over 80 years of age and yet he was given no mercy. Exposed to the elements and without food and water, the saint soon passed from this life to the next. For remaining true in the faith, he received the crown of martyrdom.

May we, like St. Valerian, remain true to the teachings of the Church and uphold them - no matter what the consequences may be for us. And may St. Valerian pray that we have courage as he did. Holy Valerian, pray for us.

Advent Preparations for the Nativity of Our Lord

In Advent, we are called by the Church to prepare for the coming of Christ - in history at the Incarnation, at the last day when He will come in Judgement, and in our hearts at all times. The tradition of the Church since very early times has been to make use of the weeks of Advent to focus more intentionally on fasting, almsgiving, and prayer as “tools” in our preparation.

Here is what St. Leo the Great, speaking to us from the fifth century, tells us about Advent preparations:

There are three things that especially pertain to the practice of religion, namely: prayer, fast, and almsgiving, in the practice of which every moment is an acceptable time; but that time should be more devoutly observed which we have received as consecrated by apostolic traditions; as also does this month record for us a custom of ancient institution; that we should now more fervently observe these three practices. For by prayer we obtain the divine favor, by fasting we extinguish the concupiscences of the flesh, by almsgiving sins are redeemed; and by all three together, the image of God is renewed in us, provided that we are ever ready in His praise, eager without ceasing for our own purification, and disposed at all times to assist our neighbor.

This threefold observance, most dearly Beloved, embraces the ends of all the virtues. It leads us to the image and

likeness of God, and makes of us inseparable companions of the Holy Spirit, because faith endures steadfast by prayer, purity of life by fasting, and the heart ever merciful through alms-deeds.

There are several additional opportunities for prayer, worship, and study during Advent:

After a Covid-restricted absence in 2020, we will resume our para-liturgical service of Advent Lessons and Carols on Saturday, December 18, at 6PM. This quiet period of prophecies and other readings and Advent hymns can provide a foil for the frenetic commercialism of the world at this time of year.

We will celebrate the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Eve, December 7, with Vespers at 6:30 and Mass at 7PM. Vespers for the Novena - nine days - before Christmas will be offered at 6PM beginning on Thursday, December 16. The antiphons for the Magnificat at these services proclaim some of the Messiah's scriptural titles: O root of Jesse, O key of David, O King of the nations... They are called the great "O Antiphons" as each one begins with the word "O".

Alay-led discussion of the Sunday readings is held via Zoom on Mondays at 4:30PM. A further look at the Epistles and Gospels for Advent will serve as more preparation for our Christmas celebrations. Please speak to Fr. Nicholas if you would like to participate in these discussions.

There are many ways to approach the fast in Advent, as well as Lent and other fasting days:

Abstaining from meat and dairy products is the most common one (and what we will observe for coffee hours and dinners during Advent), but other ways may be more appropriate and manageable for your family. Speak with the clergy if this is a concern.

There are several additional opportunities for almsgiving during Advent:

We will participate in our Archdiocese's annual Food for Hungry People collection by gathering cans and packages of food which we donate to a local food bank. There will also be opportunity for additional Christmas offerings for our parish's Support a Priest donations (for assisting the clergy in third-world countries), and donations to monasteries and local charities.

Parish News



services now.

On Christmas Eve, confessions will be heard by Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Raphael beginning at 7:30PM. We will have a brief period of carol-singing around 8:45, and the first Mass of Christmas will begin at 9PM. We will end our Advent fast with a pot-luck supper following the Liturgy. On Christmas Day, Mass will be celebrated at 10AM preceded by Matins at 9:30. As we remember the fact that last year we were restricted in the number of those who could attend, sing in the choir, and serve at the altar, it will be a joy for all of us to join together for these

The twelve-day celebration of Christmas will continue on The First Sunday After Christmas, December 26; on Saturday, January 1, with the observance of the Circumcision of Our Lord (Matins will be at 9:30 and Mass at 10AM); and on the Second Sunday after Christmas, January 2.

Congratulations to Ben Caldwell, who has received the Freedom Award, the highest award possible in Trail Life USA. He is only the fourth young man to have been given this award in the state of Maryland. Well done, Ben!

The Mystery of the Incarnation

by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

The birth of Christ is a historical event, because it took place at a specific moment in history, when Caesar Augustus was Emperor of Rome and Herod was ruler of Judaea. The Evangelists insist on emphasizing the historicity of the event because they want to say that Christ is a historical person. This means that Christ assumed real human flesh, and the incarnation was not merely seeming or imagined.

In spite of its historicity, this event remains a mystery. We know that the God-man, perfect God and perfect man, exists, but it remains a mystery how the divine nature united with human nature in the person of the Logos. Moreover, what happened to the person of Christ, that the divine nature was united hypostatically with human nature, happened just once. Therefore St. John of Damaskos said that Christ is “the only new thing under the sun”. This means that since the creation of the world and man, nothing new has happened in the world. Everything is repeated. The birth of man is a consequence and result of God’s words: *Let us make man in our image and likeness, and Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it* [Gen. 1:26-28]. The only new thing is the God-man Christ.

Thus the fact that the event is historical does not remove the mystery, but also the mystery does not do away with the historicity. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ, but at the same time we experience mysteriously in our hearts all the events connected with it, for when we are alive in the Church, we are

participating in and experiencing all the stages of the divine incarnation.

Reprinted from *The Feasts of the Lord*.

Of the Father’s Love Begotten

Most people, as they near retirement, are contemplating the travel they will soon be free to do, the books they’ve been awaiting time to read, the hobbies they are anxious to pursue. There have been some, however, who have ended successful careers in the public sphere and become ascetics, leaving behind the material pursuits of life in the world to devote themselves to more spiritual pursuits.

In the latter half of the fourth century, Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, who was born in the Spanish territories of the Roman Empire, became a lawyer and was given several important positions as governor before being called to serve at the court of Emperor Theodosius I. Toward the end of the century, Prudentius was able to walk away from all this and finally “retire” to his most important work, that of writing Christian hymns and poetry.

To better concentrate on this work, Prudentius took on ascetic practices, particularly fasting, and spent the remainder of his life writing hymns for the various feasts of the liturgical year as well as poems in defense of Orthodox Christianity against some of the heresies of his day.

The *St. Ambrose Hymnal* contains five of his hymns: “Behold the Golden Dawn Arise” (the morning office hymn for Thursdays), “Earth Has Many a Noble City” (the morning office hymn for Epiphany), “Servant of God, Remember” (a hymn which we sing in Holy Week), and “All Ye Who Seek for Jesus” (the evening office hymn for Transfiguration). The most beloved of his hymns is one



we sing at Christmas:
“Of the Father’s Love
Begotten”, which
places the Nativity of
Our Lord in the
context of all time and
creation.

*Of the Father’s love
begotten ere the
worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and*

*Omega, He the source, the ending He, of the things that are, that
have been, and that future years shall see, ever more and ever more.*

*At His word they were created; He commanded, it was done;
Heaven and earth and depths of ocean in their threefold order one;
all that grows beneath the shining of the light of moon and sun, ever
more...*

*O that birth for ever blessed! When the Virgin, full of grace, by the
Holy Ghost conceiving, bare the Savior of our race, and the Babe,
the world’s redeemer, first revealed His sacred face, ever more...*

*This is He whom seers and sages sang of old with one accord;
whom the writings of the Prophets promised in their faithful word;
now He shines, the long-expected: let creation praise its Lord, ever
more...*

May those of us who are retired from our worldly careers and
those who are contemplating retirement take heed to the
example of Aurelius Prudentius and remember that, if we devote
our time and energies to Christ and His Church, our most important
work may lie ahead!

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Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2021</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 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
5 Second Sunday in Advent; St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532 ✓	6 St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342	7 St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397 <i>Mass at 7pm</i> <i>W</i>	8 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	9	10 St. Melchia- des, PM, 314	11 St. Damasus, PC, 384 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
12 Third Sunday in Advent; St. Spiridon, BC, 348 ✓	13 St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837	14	15 Ember Wed- nesday St. Maurus, Ab, 6th c.	16 St. Eusebius of Vercelli, BM, 371 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Sapientia</i>	17 Ember Friday St. Lazarus of Bethany, BC, 1st c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Adonny</i>	18 Ember Saturday <i>Lessons & Carols at 6pm</i> <i>O Radix Jesse</i>
19 Fourth Sunday in Advent ✓ <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Clavis David</i>	20 St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Oriens</i>	21 St. Thomas, Apostle, 1st c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Rex gentium</i>	22 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Emmanuel</i>	23 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Virgo virginum</i>	24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>Confession at 7:30pm</i> <i>Carols at 8:45pm</i> <i>Mass at 9pm</i> <i>W</i>	25 The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Anastasia, VM., c. 304 <i>Mass at 10am</i> <i>W</i>
26 St. Stephen, Proto-martyr, 1st c.; Sun. after the Nativity; of the Oct. of the Nativity <i>W</i>	27 St. John, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	28 Holy Inno- cents, 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	