

The Shepherd

*An Orthodox Christian
Pastoral Magazine*

VOLUME XLIV

NUMBER 4

DECEMBER 2023





FROM THE FATHERS

“THE very keeping of abstinence is sealed four times [i.e. the four periods of fasting in the Church Year], so that during the year we know that we constantly need purification and that when life is scattered, we should always try to destroy sin by fasting and alms.”

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, +461 A.D.

“IT WAS SAID about an old man that he endured seventy weeks of fasting, eating only once a week. He asked God about certain words in the Holy Scriptures, but God did not answer him. Then he said to himself: ‘Look, I have put in this much effort, but I haven’t made any progress. So now I will go to see my brother and ask him.’ And when he had gone out, closed the door and started off, an angel of the Lord was sent to him, and said: ‘Seventy weeks of fasting have not brought you near to God. But now that you are humbled enough to go to your brother, I have been sent to you to reveal the meaning of the words.’ Then the angel explained the meaning which the old man was seeking, and went away. With fasting there must be humility! Fasting opens the way; it is a means to an end; it is not the end.”

FROM THE DESERT FATHERS

“THE FAST of the Nativity depicts the fast of Moses, who, after fasting for forty days and nights, received the inscription of the words of God on stone tablets. We, fasting for forty days, contemplate and accept the living word from the Virgin, inscribed not on stone, but incarnate and born, and partake of His Divine Body and Blood.”

SAINT SIMEON OF THESSALONICA, +1430 A.D.

The Nativity of Christ

The Great Mystery of Piety

BISHOP ALEXANDER OF BUENOS AIRES, + 2005

TRANSLATED BY SERAPHIM LARIN AND DANIEL OLSON

IN the history of mankind, there is no event greater and more joyful than the incarnation and coming of the Son of God into the world. It is an act of the endless love of God the Father, *Who so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

The incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary changed the world for the better in a radical way: It gave men a new way of thinking, ennobled their morals and directed world events along a new course. It brought men power to struggle against sin, reconciled men to God, brought about the adoption of men by the Father, and regenerated their whole nature. It poured a stream of divine life into the corrupted human organism and thereby brought eternal life to men. For these reasons, the incarnation of the Son of God proved to be at the very centre of world events, and chronology is reckoned relative to it - before and after the Nativity of Christ. The celebration of the Nativity of Christ became a most joyous festival of believing humanity.

In the present article, we shall recount the events surrounding the Nativity of Christ, we shall talk about the spiritual significance of this event.

The Event of the Nativity of Christ

Preceding the Nativity of Jesus Christ, there was a general expectation of the Saviour. The Jews expected His coming on the basis of prophecies, and all the prophecies relating to the coming of the Son of God had been fulfilled. For example, the Patriarch Jacob had foretold that the Saviour would come when

the sceptre would depart from Judah (Gen. 49:10). The prophet Daniel had foretold that the Kingdom of the Messiah would begin at the seventieth week (490 years) after the issuance of a command concerning the restoration of Jerusalem, during the era of a powerful pagan kingdom, which would be as strong as iron (Dan. 9:24-27). And, indeed, at the end of Daniel's seventy weeks, Judæa fell under the dominion of the mighty Roman Empire, while the sceptre passed from Judah to Herod, an Idumæan by birth.

The pagans also, in misery from unbelief and a general dissipation of morals, expected a Deliverer with impatience. Men, having fallen away from God, began to deify earthly good things, wealth and worldly glory. The Son of God rejected these worthless idols as the fruit of sin and human passions and was pleased to come into the world under the most modest conditions.

Two Evangelists describe the events of the Nativity: the Apostles Matthew (of the Twelve) and Luke (of the seventy disciples). Since the Evangelist Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Hebrews, he set himself the aim of proving that the Messiah descended from the forefathers Abraham and King David, as had been foretold by the prophets. Therefore, the Evangelist Matthew begins his narrative of the Nativity of Christ with a genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17).

Knowing that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, the Evangelist does not say that Joseph begat Jesus, but says that Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ. But why, then, does he adduce Joseph's genealogy and not Mary's? The Hebrews did not have the custom of reckoning genealogies according to the female line, but their Law commanded a man to take a wife without fail from the tribe to which he belonged. Therefore, the Evangelist, not deviating from custom, adduces Joseph's genealogy, to show that Mary, Joseph's wife, and consequently also Jesus, descend from the same tribe of Judah and clan of David.

The most holy Virgin, informed by the Archangel Gabriel that she had been chosen to become the mother of the Messiah, set out for a meeting with Elizabeth, being only the espoused

bride of Joseph. Almost three months had already passed since the good tidings of the angel. Joseph, who had not been initiated into this mystery, noticed her condition; her outward appearance gave him cause to consider unfaithfulness. He could have publicly denounced her and subjected her to the severe punishment established by the Law of Moses, but, in accordance with his goodness, he did not want to resort to such a drastic measure. After long vacillations, he decided to put his bride away secretly, without making any publicity, having delivered to her a bill of divorcement.

But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and declared that the bride espoused to him would give birth by the Holy Spirit; therefore he advised Joseph, *'fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.'* And he was further instructed to name the Son born of her Jesus (Ieshua), that is, Saviour, since He would save His people from their sins. Joseph recognised this dream as inspiration from on high and obeyed it, taking Mary as his wife, but knew her not, that is, he lived with her not as a husband with a wife, but as a brother with a sister (or, judging from the enormous difference in years, rather as a father with a daughter). In narrating this, the Evangelist adds for himself: *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel* (Es. 7:14). The name "Emmanuel" means "God with us." Here, Esaias (Isaiah) is not calling the One born of the Virgin Emmanuel: he is saying that men will call Him such. Thus, this is not the proper name of the One born of the Virgin, but only a prophetic indication that God will be in His person.

The holy Evangelist Luke notes that the time of the Nativity of Christ coincided with a census of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. This census was carried out in accordance with the command of Cæsar Augustus, that is, the Roman Emperor Octavian, who had received the title Augustus ("sacred") from the Roman Senate. The edict on the census came out in the 746th year from the founding of Rome, but in Judæa the census began approximately in the 750th year, during the final years of the reign of Herod, who was surnamed the Great.

The Hebrews reckoned their genealogies according to tribes and clans. This custom was so strong that, having learned of the command of Augustus, they went to be registered each to the town of his clan. Joseph and the Virgin Mary descended, as is well known, from the clan of David. Therefore, they went to set out for Bethlehem, called the city of David because David was born there. Thus, by God's Providence, the ancient prophesy of the Prophet Micheas was fulfilled, that Christ would be born precisely in Bethlehem: *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratha, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* (Mic.5:2, Matt.2:6).

According to Roman laws, women were subject to the universal census equally with men. Therefore, Joseph went to Bethlehem not alone, but with the Most Holy Virgin. An unexpected journey to his native Bethlehem, a journey so close to the delivery of the Infant, must have convinced Joseph that Cæsar's decree was providential, directing events for the Son of Mary to be born precisely where the Messiah-Saviour ought to be born.

After an exhausting journey, the elderly Joseph and the Virgin Mary arrived in Bethlehem. There was no room in the inn for the mother of the Saviour of the world, and she, with her companion, was forced to lodge in a cave, where livestock were driven from pasture during bad weather. Here, during a winter night, under the most wretched conditions, the Saviour of the world, Christ, was born.

Having borne a Son, the Most Holy Virgin herself swaddled Him and laid Him in a manger. In these brief words, the Evangelist informs us that the Mother of God gave birth painlessly. The Evangelist's expression, brought forth her firstborn son, causes unbelievers to say that, after Jesus the first-born, the Most Holy Virgin had other children, since the Evangelists mention the "brethren" of Christ (Simon, Joses, Judas and James). However, according to the Law of Moses (Ex.13:2), every infant of the male sex that openeth the womb was called the first-born, even if he were the last. The so-called "brethren"

of Jesus in the Gospels are not His own brothers, but only relatives, the children of the aged Joseph by his first wife, Salome, and also the children of Mary the wife of Cleophas (whom the Evangelist John calls his mother's sister). In any case, they all were much older than Christ and therefore could not in any way be the children of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus Christ was born at night, when everyone in Bethlehem and its environs was sleeping. Only the shepherds, who were watching over the flock entrusted to them, were not sleeping. Unto these modest men, who laboured and were heavy laden, an angel appeared with the joyous tidings of the birth of the Saviour of the world. The resplendent light surrounding the angel amidst the nocturnal darkness frightened the shepherds. But the angel at once calmed them, saying: *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* By these words, the angel gave them to understand the true purpose of the Messiah, Who had come not for the Jews alone, but for all people, for joy would be to all people who would accept Him as the Saviour. The angel explained to the shepherds that they would find Christ, the Lord Who had been born, in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Why did an angel not announce the birth of Christ to the Jewish elders, to the scribes and the Pharisees, calling them also to worship the Divine Infant? Because these blind leaders of the blind had ceased to understand the true meaning of the prophecies concerning the Messiah and, on account of their exclusiveness and haughtiness, they imagined that the Deliverer would appear in the full splendour of a majestic conqueror, to subjugate the whole world. The modest preacher of peace and love toward one's enemies was unacceptable to them.

The shepherds did not doubt that the angel had been sent to them from God, and therefore they were counted worthy to hear the triumphant heavenly hymn: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.* The angels glorify God, Who had sent the Saviour to men, for from that time, the peace of the conscience has been restored and the enmity be-

tween heaven and earth, which arose as a consequence of sin, has been eliminated.

The angels withdrew, while the shepherds hastily set out for Bethlehem; they found the Infant lying in a manger and were the first to worship Him. They told Mary and Joseph about the event that had brought them to the cradle of Christ; they told the same to others also, and all that heard their story were astonished. *But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*, i.e., she remembered all that she had heard. The Evangelist Luke, who describes many events in the life of the Virgin, such as the Annunciation and the details of the birth of Christ (Luke, Ch. 2), evidently wrote from her words. On the eighth day after his birth, the Infant was circumcised as prescribed by the Law of Moses.

The Adoration of the Magi

A further Gospel story, concerning the adoration of the Magi (Matt., Ch. 2), is very edifying. This is, first of all, a story about the “epiphany” or manifestation of Christ to the pagans.

Joseph and the Most Holy Mother of God with the Infant Jesus were still in Bethlehem when Magi came to Jerusalem from a distant land to the east (Persia or Babylon). Learned men, engaged in observing and studying the stars, were called Magi or wise men. At that time, men believed that, at the birth of a great man, a new star appears in the sky. Many pagans within the confines of Persia, had learned from the dispersed Jews of the coming of the Messiah, the Great King of Israel. From the Jews, they could even have learned the following prophecy of Balaam relating to the Messiah: *I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab* (Num. 24:17). (“Moab” is a personification of the enemies of the Messiah.) The Persian Magi thus expected that, when the promised King would be born, a new star would appear in the sky. The prophecy of Balaam spoke of a star in the spiritual sense; nevertheless, the Lord, in His mercy, to bring the pagans to faith, gave a sign in the sky in the form of the ap-

pearance of an extraordinary star. Having seen it, the Magi understood that the expected King had been born.

After a protracted and long journey, they finally reached Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish kingdom, and began to ask: *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.* These words from such conspicuous strangers, stirred up many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including King Herod, to whom the arrival of the exotic eastern scholars was immediately reported.

From the first days of his accession, Herod's throne had been shaky. The people hated him as a usurper of the Davidic throne and a tyrant, and they abhorred him as a pagan. The last years of Herod's life were complicated still more by personal adversities and bloody reprisals. He became extremely suspicious, and for the least cause executed enemies both real and imagined. Thus perished several of Herod's children and even his wife, whom earlier he had loved ardently. Ill and decrepit, Herod now resided in his new palace in Sion. Having heard of a King Who had been born, he became particularly agitated. Vulnerable in his old age, he feared that his rule would be over-thrown and handed over to the newborn King.

In order to clear up just who this new pretender to the throne was, Herod gathered all the priests and scribes, men that knew the books of Sacred Scripture well, and he inquired of them where Christ should be born. They answered: *In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet Micah.* Then Herod privately summoned the Magi, found out from them the time of the appearance of the star, and sent them on to Bethlehem. Feigning piety, the cunning Herod said to them: *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.* In fact, Herod was going to use their report to put the Infant to death.

The Magi listened to King Herod without suspecting anything, and went to Bethlehem. There again that star appeared, which they had seen before in the east. Moving across the sky, it

went before them, indicating the way. In Bethlehem, the star stopped over that spot where the Infant Jesus was, Who had been born.

The Magi went into the house and saw the Infant Jesus with His mother. They bowed down to the ground before Him and presented to Him their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh (a precious aromatic oil). In the gifts of the Magi, one may see the following symbolic significance. They brought gold to Him, as to a King (as tribute or taxes); frankincense, as to God (incense is used at divine services); and myrrh, as to a Man Who must die (the dead were anointed with oils mixed with aromatic myrrh).

Having worshipped the King awaited by all, the Magi would have returned to Jerusalem and to King Herod. However, an angel appeared to them in a dream, revealing Herod's perfidious designs, and told them to return to their own country by another way, without passing through Jerusalem. Tradition has preserved the names of the Magi, who afterwards became Christians: Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar.

Thus, the first to worship the Saviour Who had been born were shepherds, nature's true children, who could open up before Him only the treasure of their hearts, full of simplicity, faith and humility. Significantly later came the Magi from the East, imbued with erudite wisdom, who laid down gold, frankincense and myrrh, together with reverent joy, before the Divine Infant. They had had to make a long journey to reach Judæa, and even from Jerusalem, they were not immediately able to find the birthplace of the King of the Jews. Does this not indicate that both simplicity of heart and profound, conscientious erudition lead equally to Christ? But the first way is more direct, short and sure than the second. The shepherds were guided directly by angels, while the Magi were "taught" by an unreasoning star, and, through Herod, by the scribes and the Jewish elders. Not without difficulties and dangers did they attain their desired goal, and they did not hear the heavenly harmony that sounded over the earth - *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.* (Metropolitan Anastasy's thought).

The Son of God and the Son of Man

“Great is the mystery of godliness [piety]: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). These words of the holy Apostle testify that the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God exceeds the understanding of our limited mind. Indeed, we can believe, but cannot explain, the event that took place two thousand years ago in Bethlehem: that, in the one Person of Jesus Christ, two natures so different and contrary in essence were joined together: the superterrestrial, eternal and infinite divine nature with the material, limited and feeble human nature.

Nonetheless, the Gospels and the apostolic epistles reveal to us, to the extent of our abilities, certain aspects of the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God. Saint John the Theologian, at the very beginning of his Gospel, elevates our thought to the pre-eternal existence of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, Whom he calls the Word, saying: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:1-3, 14).

The Son of God’s name, the Word, indicates that one must not understand His birth from the Father in the sense of an ordinary birth: it occurred passionlessly and without separation. The Son of God is born from the Father like a word is born from a thought. A thought and a word are distinct from one another, and at the same time inseparable. There is no word without a thought, and a thought is without fail expressed in a word.

The subsequent apostolic preaching reveals all the more fully the truth of Christ’s divine-human nature: He is the only begotten (the only) Son of God, Who was begotten of the Father before all ages, i.e., He is eternal, as God the Father is also eternal. The Son of God has the same divine nature that God the Father has, and is therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the Creator of the visible and invisible worlds, and of us men. In a word, He, being the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, is true and perfect God. Faith in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God represents the stronghold or rock

upon which the Church is established, according to the word of the Lord: *Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matt. 16:18).

Being perfect God, Christ the Saviour is at the same time also perfect Man. He had a human body and soul with all its properties-reason, will and senses. As a man, He was born of the Virgin Mary. As the Son of Mary, He obeyed her and Joseph. As a man, He was baptised in the Jordan and went around the towns and villages with His salvific preaching. As a man, He experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue; he had a need for sleep and rest; he endured painful sensations and physical sufferings. Living the physical life inherent to a man, the Lord also lived a spiritual life as a man. He strengthened His spiritual powers by fasting and by prayer. He experienced human feelings-joy, wrath, sorrow; He shed tears. In this way, the Lord Jesus Christ, having taken on our human nature, was in all things like unto us, except for sin.

Having two natures, Jesus Christ also had two free wills. Jesus Christ's rational, conscious, human will invariably subordinates its human aspirations and desires to His divine will. But the human will in Christ is clearly visible during His difficult experiences in the garden of Gethsemane: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt* (Matt. 26:39).

Thus, by His obedience to God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ corrected our disobedience and taught us to put God's will above our own desires.

The Purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God

The parable of the lost sheep speaks graphically and vividly of the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into the world. The good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep, by which is meant the angelic world, and sets out for the mountains in order to seek out his lost sheep, the human race perishing in sins. The shepherd's great love for the perishing sheep is evident not only in the fact that he solicitously seeks it, but especially in the fact that after finding it, he takes it upon his shoulders and carries it

back. In other words, God, by His power, returns to man the innocence, holiness and blessedness lost by him; having united Himself with our human nature, the Son of God, according to the word of the Prophet, *hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows* (Es., Ch. 53).

Christ became man not only to teach us the true way and to show us a good example. He became man in order to unite us with Himself, to join our feeble, diseased human nature to His divinity. The Nativity of Christ testifies to the fact that we attain the ultimate aim of our life not only by faith and by striving for good, but chiefly by the regenerating power of the incarnate Son of God, with Whom we are united.

Delving deeply into the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, we see that it is closely bound up with the mystery of Holy Communion and with the Church, which, according to apostolic teaching, is the mystical Body of Christ. In Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, a man is joined to the divine-human nature of Christ; he unites with Him and in this union is wholly transfigured. At the same time, in Holy Communion, a Christian unites also with other members of the Church, and thus the mystical Body of Christ grows.

Heterodox Christians who do not believe in Holy Communion understand union with Christ in an allegorical, metaphorical sense, or in the sense of only a spiritual communion with Him. But for spiritual communion, the incarnation of the Son of God is superfluous. After all, even before the Nativity of Christ, the prophets and the righteous were counted worthy of grace-filled communion with God.

One must understand that man is ill not only spiritually, but also physically: all of human nature has been harmed by sin. It is essential, therefore, to heal the whole man, not only his spiritual part. To remove any doubt in the necessity for total communion with Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His discourse on the Bread of Life, speaks thus: *Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day... He that eateth My flesh, and*

drinketh My blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him (John 6:53-54, 56). Later, Christ uses the metaphor of the grapevine to explain to His disciples that it is precisely in close union with Him that man receives the strength essential for spiritual development and perfection: *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing* (John 15:4-5).

Some holy Fathers have justly likened Holy Communion to the mystical tree of life, from which our primogenitors ate in Eden, and which afterwards Saint John the Theologian saw in Paradise (Gen. 2:9, Rev. 2:7, 22:2). In Holy Communion, a Christian is joined to the immortal life of the God-Man.

Thus, the purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God lies in the spiritual and physical regeneration of man. Spiritual renewal is accomplished throughout the course of a Christian's whole life. But the renewal of his physical nature is completed on the day of the general resurrection of the dead, *when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father* (Matt. 13:43).



THE COMING MONTH

THE whole month of December is taken up with the celebration of the **Saviour's Nativity in Bethlehem**. In the first twenty-four days we are fasting and preparing for the feast and the rest of the month is dedicated to the celebration itself, which lasts seven days. However, in this issue we have three pieces about various aspects of this and so here let us simply concentrate on the saints celebrated through the month.

Our **Holy Father Gennadius, Archbishop of Novgorod**, is celebrated on the same day as the Great Martyr Barbara and the Venerable John of Damascus (4th / 17th). He was descended from the Gonzov family and was, in the testimony of

contemporaries, “dignified, intelligent, virtuous and learned in the Holy Scripture.” He was tonsured a monk at the Valaam monastery, under the spiritual guidance of Saint Sabbatius of Solovki. From the year 1472, he was Archimandrite of the Chudov Monastery in Moscow. Zealous for celebrating divine services according to the Typicon, he and Bassian, Archbishop of Rostov, and later his successor Joasaph, fearlessly rose up in defence of the ancient practice during a dispute at the consecration of the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow during the years 1479-1481. In A.D. 1483 Saint Gennadius began construction of a stone church at the Chudov monastery in honour of Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow, the founder of the monastery. On 12th December, 1484 Saint Gennadius was consecrated as Archbishop of Novgorod. Already in Novgorod, but still honouring the memory of Saint Alexis, Gennadius did not cease to concern himself with the construction of the church, even contributing silver for its completion. The time of holy Archbishop Gennadius as hierarch at Novgorod coincided with a terrible period in the history of the Church in Russia. In 1470, Judaising preachers, who travelled to Novgorod in the guise of merchants, had already begun to plant the weeds of heresy and apostasy among the Orthodox. The first reports about the heresy reached Saint Gennadius in the year 1487. Four members of a secret society, in a state of intoxication, opened up and told the Orthodox of the existence of the impious heresy. As soon as it became known to him, the zealous archpastor immediately began an inquiry and with deep sorrow became convinced that the danger was a threat not only to local Novgorod piety, but also in Moscow, the very capital, where the leaders of the Judaisers had journeyed in 1480. In September 1487 he sent to Metropolitan Gerontius at Moscow all the material from the inquiry, together with a list of the apostates he had discovered, as well as their writings. The struggle with the Judaisers became the main focus of Saint Gennadius’ archpastoral activity. In the words of Saint Joseph of Volokolamsk, “this archbishop, angered by the malevolent heretics, pounced upon them like a lion from out of the thicket of the Holy Scriptures and the splendid heights of the prophets and the apostolic teachings.” For twelve

years Saint Gennadius and Saint Joseph struggled against the most powerful attempts of the opponents of Orthodoxy to alter the course of the history of the Church in Russia and the state. By their efforts the Orthodox were victorious. The works of Gennadius in the study of the Bible contributed to this victory. The heretics in their impious cleverness used texts from the Old Testament, but ones which were different from the texts accepted by the Orthodox. Archbishop Gennadius undertook an enormous task: bringing the correct listings of Holy Scripture together in a single codex. Up until this time Biblical books had been copied in Russia, following the example of Byzantium, not in their entirety, but in separate parts: the Pentateuch or Octateuch, Kings, Proverbs, the Psalter, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles, and other instructive books. The holy books of the Old Testament in particular often were subjected to both accidental and intentional errors. Saint Gennadius wrote about this with sorrow in a letter to Archbishop Joasaph: "The Judaising heretical tradition adheres to the Psalms of David, or prophecies which they have altered." Gathering around himself learned and industrious Biblical scholars, the saint collected all the books of the Holy Scripture into a single codex, and he gave his blessing for the Holy Books which were not found in manuscripts of the traditional Slavonic Bible to be retranslated from the Latin language. In A.D. 1499 the first complete codex of Holy Scripture in Slavonic ("The Gennadius Bible," as it is called it after its compiler) was published in Russia. This work became an integral link in the succession of Slavonic translations of the Word of God. From the God-inspired translation of the Holy Scripture by Saints Cyril and Methodius, through the Bible of Saint Gennadius, reproduced in the first printed Bible (Ostrozh, 1581), the Church has maintained a Slavonic Biblical tradition right through the so-called Elizabethan Bible (1751) and all successive printed editions. Together with the preparation of the Bible, the circle of church scholars under Archbishop Gennadius also undertook a great literary task: the compilation of the "Fourth Novgorod Chronicle." Numerous handwritten books were translated, corrected and transcribed, bringing the Chronicle up to the year 1496. Dositheus, the abbot

of the Solovki monastery who was at Novgorod on monastery matters, worked for several years with Saint Gennadius compiling a library for the Solovki monastery. It was at the request of Saint Gennadius that Dositheus wrote the Lives of Saints Zosimas and Sabbatius. The majority of the books transcribed with the blessing of the Novgorod hierarch (more than twenty), were preserved in the collection of Solovki manuscripts. Ever a zealous advocate for spiritual enlightenment, Saint Gennadius founded a school for the preparation of worthy clergy at Novgorod. The memory of Saint Gennadius is preserved also in his work for the welfare of the Orthodox Church. At the end of the fifteenth century many Russians were concerned about the impending end of the world, which they believed would take place at the end of the seventh millennium from the creation of the world (in 1492 A.D.). Therefore, in 1408, it was decided not to compute the Paschal dates beyond the year 1491. In September 1491, however, the Archbishops' Council at Moscow, with the participation of Saint Gennadius, decreed that the Paschalion for the eighth millennium be calculated. Metropolitan Zosimas at Moscow on 27th November, 1492 "set forth a cathedral Paschalion for twenty years," and asked Bishop Philotheus of Perm and Archbishop Gennadius of Novgorod each to compile their own Paschalion for conciliar review and confirmation on 21st December, 1492. Saint Gennadius finished calculating his Paschalion, which in contrast to that of the Metropolitan, extended to seventy years. It was distributed to the dioceses, with the approval of the Council, as the accepted Paschalion for the next twenty years. Included with the Paschalion was Saint Gennadius's own commentary upon it in an encyclical entitled, "Source for the Paschalion Transposed to the Eight Thousandth Year." In his theological explanation of the Paschalion, based upon the Word of God and the holy Fathers, the saint wrote: "It is proper not to fear the end of the world, but rather to await the coming of Christ at every moment. For just as God might deign to end the world, so also might He deign to prolong the course of time." No one knows when the world created by God will end, "not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt. 24:36). Therefore, the

holy Fathers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, explained the cycle of years from the creation of the world precisely as a cycle. "This occurs in a circular motion, not having an end." The saint contrasts the heretical methods of calculating the times with the way hallowed by the Church, a constant spiritual sobriety. Saint Gennadius expounded on the theological fundamentals of the Paschalion. He explained that on the basis of the cycle of years from the world's creation, it is possible to determine a Paschalion for the future, as may be required. The Paschalion of Saint Gennadius, by his own testimony, was not something new that he created, but rather was based on earlier tradition; in part, on the basis of the Paschalion for 1360-1492 from Saint Basil Kalika, Archbishop of Novgorod. In 1539, under Archbishop Macarius of Novgorod, a Paschalion was compiled for the eighth millennium, based on the principles of the Paschalion of Saint Gennadius. A prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos, which he composed in 1497, also demonstrates his deep spiritual life and prayerful inspiration. In addition to his letters to Metropolitan Zosimas and Simon, to Archbishop Joasaph, to Bishops Niphon and Prochorus, and a letter to the 1490 Council, Archbishop Gennadius also wrote a church "Small Rule" and the "Tradition for Monks," who live according to the monastic Rule of skete life. Leaving his archpastoral service in A.D. 1504, the saint lived in retirement at the Chudov monastery, where he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord on 4th December, 1505. Archbishop Gennadius served as archbishop for nineteen years, beautifying the churches, improving the behaviour of the clergy, and proclaiming the Orthodox Faith among the heretics. Then he lived at Moscow for a year and a half at the Chudov monastery, dedicated to the Miracle of the Archangel Michael and to Saint Alexis the Metropolitan and wonderworker, where he had been Archimandrite, and then he fell asleep in the Lord. The holy relics of Saint Gennadius were placed in the church of the Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae, in that place particularly venerated by him, where the relics of Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow rested. Saint Gennadius is also commemorated on the third Sunday after Pentecost, when the Church remembers all the Saints who shone forth at Novgorod.

His fight against heresy is a witness against those of our times who endorse ecclesiastical ties with those who do not confess the Faith of our Church, and his words on the end of the world should be a timely warning to those, even within the Church, who always embrace and promulgate groundless suppositions.

Our **Holy Father Athanasius, Bishop of Methoni** (10th / 23rd), the title which our Bishop now bears, was born in Catania, Sicily probably between A.D. 814 and 818. Around 827 his parents, because the Arabs ravaged Sicily, came to Old Patras in the Peloponnese. This was the great age when there lived in Patras the future great and wise hierarch of Caesarea, Arethas of Patras. Although he was still young in age, Athanasius requested that he become a monk in one of the monasteries of the area. Bravely he set about the monastic struggle and quickly attained the prize of his high calling, which is why the then Metropolitan of Patras made him abbot of the monastery, despite his repeated refusals. His position as abbot did not stop him from living a virtuous life, rather he proved that he could serve the Church also in its highest office, which is why the Metropolitan of Patras ordained him as Bishop of Methoni, which at that time was subject to his Metropolis. As bishop in small Methoni, Athanasius worked with admirable zeal to respond to all the material and spiritual needs of his flock, while being a perfect model of evangelical poverty and all the Christian virtues. When the time approached for his passing to God, he called for his disciples and advised them to always exercise the virtue of love and maintain continuously the re-membrance of the Second Coming of the Lord. After his blessed repose (around A.D. 880), his grave became a source of miracles, which is why many people ran to him for healing. Saint Peter, Bishop of Argos, visited this shrine and delivered a panegyric in honour of Saint Athanasius, and it is from this that we receive much information about his life. The memory of Saint Athanasius was celebrated on 10th December, but due to the occupations of the region by Franks, Turks and Venetians, his memory was forgotten from local memory. It has been revived in recent times through God's mercies.



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“I have been to several churches in my search, and notice that in some, people are continually crossing themselves and in others hardly ever at all. Is there a correct way? Why these differences?” - F.C., Crawley

THERE are several aspects to this. First of all, remember the Orthodox Christians in this country generally come from various different countries or have learned from such people and naturally those differing heritages had their own customs and usages, some of them commendable and some not so. I remember when I first went to the old Russian Orthodox church in Emperor's Gate, London, if you stood at the back the congregation looked almost like the wheat in a harvest field being blown in the wind, they were crossing and bowing so much. Another thing is that those who are chanting in choir or reading do not cross themselves while doing so, so as not to disturb their reading or chanting or that of the others with them. A third aspect is that in some of the more enclosed monastic houses, they cross quite infrequently, but these are those who are experienced in inner prayer and stillness. Sadly there is a fourth aspect which is ever more apparent - people often just follow what they see others doing, with little or no conscious thought. So if the people up front in church happen to be day-dreaming, distracted, or simply not following the services, they fail to cross themselves and those further back follow their example. But perhaps what is more important to know is how often one should cross oneself in the services. For those of us who are learners and need every aid at our disposal to maintain heedfulness and attention, it would seem advisable to do so at all the places where we give glory unto God, on each petition and the exclamation in the litanies, and when any phrase being read or chanted is particularly meaningful for you. And you should, of course, cross yourself and bow three times when you enter the church, and as you leave. In many churches, they do not cross themselves at the doxologies in the middle of the Six Psalms because of the particular dread significance of that time. It represents

the Dread Judgment and therefore it is a time when we should put aside other thoughts, stand quietly, and concentrate on these penitential prayers. And again one should not cross oneself when the celebrant is doing so, or when asking a blessing, as if to countermand his blessing or protect yourself from it.



*NEWS from the Richmond
Diocese of the Church of the Genuine
Orthodox Christians of Greece*

ARCHPASTORAL VISIT

OUR BISHOP, **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni**, arrived in England again on Thursday, 9th November. Late in the evening he was met at Heathrow by **Priestmonk Sabbas** and he stayed with us at Brookwood until the following Sunday. On the Saturday, the feast day of Saint Anastasia the Roman, the Venerable Abraamius and Maria of Mesopotamia, and Armistice Day, he concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with **Father John Somers**, Father Sabbas and **Deacon Ioan Turcu**, and afterwards at the buffet-style breakfast he talked to the parishioners who had gathered for the feasts. On the Sunday, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the same concelebrants, this time joined by **Archimandrite Daniel**. He preached on the Gospel reading appointed for that day, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and emphasised that the greatest virtue is love. Then, again, he joined everyone at the Parish Breakfast and talked with the faithful, before being taken to London by Fr Ioan, spending the next two days there before returning to Greece.

SUBDEACON DMITRI, PRINCE GALITZINE

DMITRI GALITZINE, who for most of his life was a loyal, prominent and active member of the parish of the **Cathedral Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God** (ROCA) but joined the traditionalist Orthodox when that church accepted submission to the Patriarchate of Moscow in 2007, died while on a visit to Greece and was laid to rest in the cemetery of the **Convent of the Holy Angels in Afidnai**. He had been made subdeacon by **Bishop Paul of Stuttgart** in the late seventies. Recently arrangements were made to bring his bones back to England so that they might be laid to rest with those of his wife, **Patricia**, at Brookwood. The reburial was arranged to fall while Metropolitan Ambrose was with us. On Saturday, 29th October / 11th November, at mid-afternoon a liti was chanted for him in Saint Edward's Church by Metropolitan Ambrose, Archimandrite Daniel, Father John Somers and Priestmonk Sabbas, assisted by Deacon Ioan; he was then re-buried in our cemetery, and after the service a Mercy Meal was provided by family and friends. About fifty people attended both from our church and from the ROCA-MP parish in Chiswick.

CHURCHING AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ON SUNDAY, 16th / 29th October, between Matins and the Divine Liturgy, Priestmonk Sabbas read the forty-day prayers for **Aspasia Deskos** before bringing her into the church, and churching her new-born daughter, **Joanna**.

OVERSEAS OUTREACH

BETWEEN 13th and 17th November, **Fr Thomas** visited the **Convent of the Holy Angels, Afidnai, Greece**, to help the sisters there set up their bookbindery and to instruct them in various aspects of the work. One of the sisters from the nearby **Convent of the All-Holy Theotokos of the Myrtle Tree** also attended. He also briefly visited that community, and was given a branch of their myrtle tree which was grown as a

cutting from the original tree in which the miraculous icon was found.

VISITORS

FR JOHN SOMERS and his son, **Joseph**, from the United States, stayed with us over the weekend that Metropolitan Ambrose was also with us, and were thus able to meet him for the first time and talk with him. They stayed on until the Tuesday and **Larisa Bouaka** kindly took them to the airport early in the morning, when we could not because we had a Liturgy then.

ON Friday, 10th November, four student R.E. teachers visited us, and after being given a tour of the church, they went to the exhibition room for refreshments. While they were there Metropolitan Ambrose came and talked to them about our Faith and answered their questions. They spent about two hours here. Their visit had been arranged by **Dave Legrand, Head of Religious Education** of the **Arundel and Brighton Diocese** (R.C.).

ON Friday, 17th November, **Archimandrite Ambrose Vesic** and **Fr Dragan Lazic** of the Serbian Orthodox Church paid a surprise visit to Saint Edward's. Fr Dragan serves at **St Sava's Church in Ladbroke Grove, London**, and brought Fr Ambrose who is studying for a post-graduate degree in Greece, where he serves in the Russian Church in Athens. After visiting the church they came to the exhibition room for refreshments. Fr Sabbas had very briefly met Fr Ambrose at Heathrow when he was waiting to meet Metropolitan Ambrose. It seems the two Ambroses came to England at the same time.

ON 22nd November, **H. S. H. Prince Donatus of Hohenzollern** visited Saint Edward's Church together with **Francesco Chico**, and **Jon Davies** (of Knaphill Print Co) who had earlier introduced the Prince to our community. The Prince kindly gave us some *Lebkuchen* ('cake for life'), a traditional German Christmas treat.

NEW ICONS FOR THE CHURCH

METROPOLITAN GERONTIOS of Peiraios and Salamina kindly sent us a large icon of **Saint Edward the Martyr**, a copy of the one that they have in their church.

Ivan and Nedelya Nenov have donated a large and very beautiful icon of the **Venerable New Martyr Elizabeth of Russia**, the former Grand Duchess. It was painted by the sisters of the Convent of the Holy Angels.

Michael and Angela Pieri have kindly given us two icons, one of the Mother of God and the other of our Saviour's Transfiguration, which had belonged to Angela's brother, **Andreas Stratis**, who was one of our community's benefactors.

IMPROVEMENTS AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ONE of our parishioners, who wishes to remain anonymous, after due consultation with us, has donated a handrail to aid the elderly and disabled to descend from the ambon after receiving the Holy Mysteries. Its construction was undertaken by **Deacon Ioan Turcu**, and it is rather handsome and fitting for the church.

AFTER being given a large donation by another of our parishioners, we decided to fix the **annexe to the kitchen** which had got into a rather deplorable state. This led to changes in the kitchen itself and these naturally grew as more things were inspected. We also found that the **damp in the lavatory for disabled people** was more widespread than thought. It appears to have been caused by two things: leaks from the turret and a broken and blocked drain, which meant the ground outside was sodden and the rendering at the bottom of the building had been destroyed, so those things are being remedied and a new floor laid in that room. The work is being undertaken by **Ekon Building** and their excellent workmen.

BURIAL AT BROOKWOOD

ON Wednesday, 25th October, **Norman Coles** was laid to rest in the small section of our cemetery which we reserve for non-Orthodox people who have greatly helped us. For many years Norman worked for the main cemetery here in various capacities, and during that time and afterwards helped us in various ways. He was laid to rest next to his wife, **Gladys**, and the funeral had been served at the **Roman Catholic Church in Knaphill**. **Fr Stephen Farragher** had come over from Ireland to do so, being a long-time friend of Norman's.

Practical Tip

MOST of our people living in the now largely secularist West experience difficulties at this time of year, December having become Party Month at a time when we, Orthodox Christians, are enjoined to keep the Nativity Fast. How strict one should be depends on heaps of considerations: the people involved, your relationship to them, their needs, your responsibility towards them, and so on. If you have an elderly grannie who lives alone and prepares you a meal that is not strictly fasting, that is very different from arranging to go with a band of friends carousing in Ibiza, Mykonos or the Maldives, places favoured by those who seek after carnal gratification. Other engagements probably fall between these extremes but still many can be disregarded, office parties and reunions and the like. You would ignore them in any case if you had a more attractive alternative, and indeed you do: attaining to the celebration of the Nativity of our Saviour. But two things to bear in mind; first always ask advice from the priest to whom you confess, and if you happen to break the fast, then confess it and perhaps give alms more generously, spend more time on spiritual reading, do some voluntary work or help a neighbour in difficulties. This will not of course pay off your debt, but it will show that you recognise your failure and are trying to do your best and trying to make amends for it.